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the main dish

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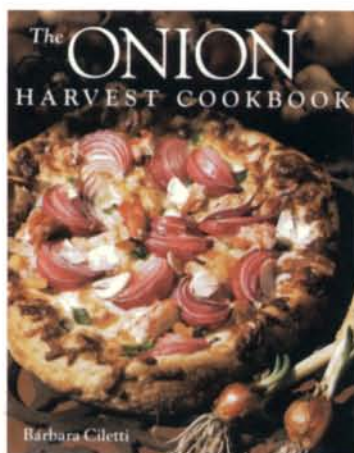
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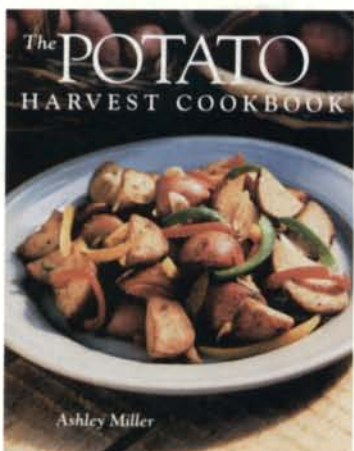
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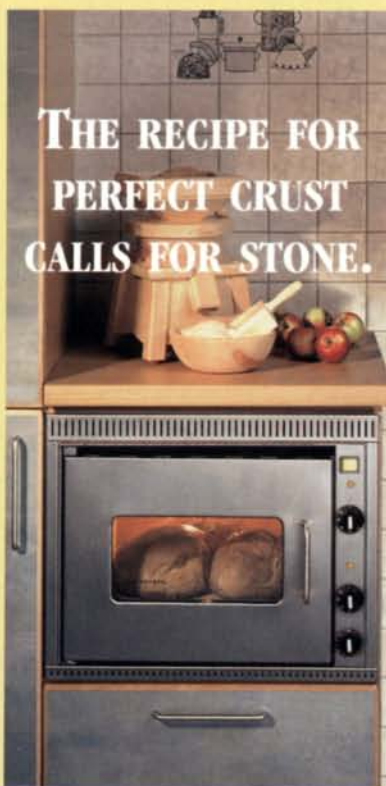
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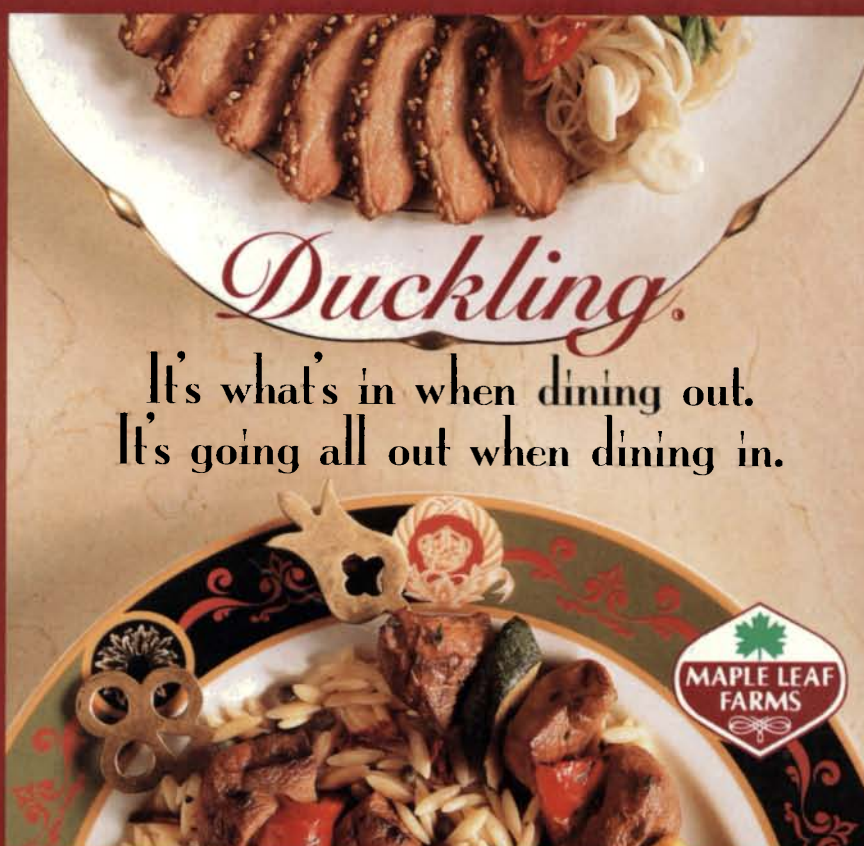
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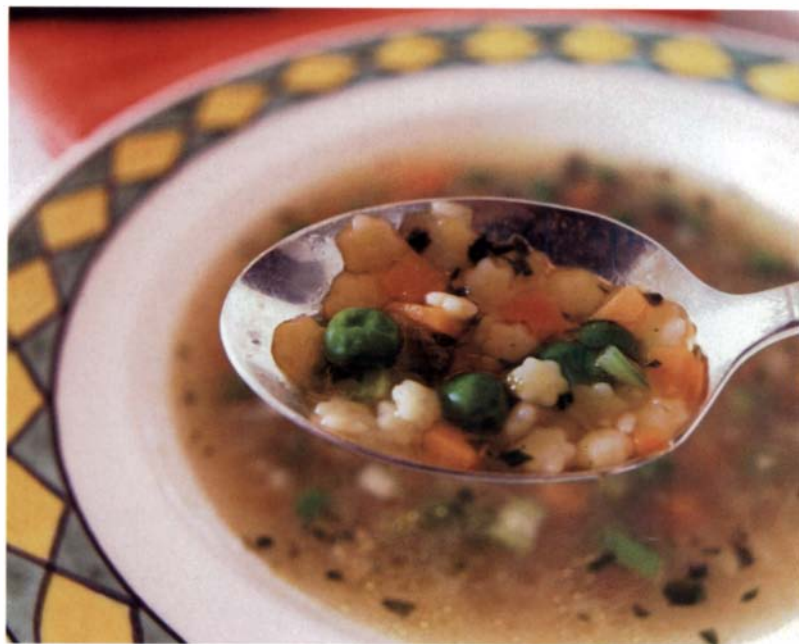
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Cover photo, Daniel Proctor. These pages: illustration, Julie Johnson; photos clockwise from top, Scott Phillips, Grey Crawford, and Daniel Proctor.



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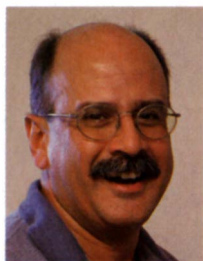
Lucia Watson (left, "Potatoes as the Main Event," p. 30) is the chef-owner of Lucia's Restaurant, an American-style bistro in Minneapolis and one of *Gourmet* magazine's regional best, now celebrating its fourteenth year. Lucia changes her

menu every week, except for the one week in August when she closes shop and takes her two dogs to Rainy Lake in Canada. She serves on the board of directors of Chefs Collaborative 2000. **Beth Dooley** (right) is a New Jersey transplant to Minneapolis. She teaches cooking and writes for *Mpls/St. Paul Magazine* and *The Garden Letter*, as well as for "The Splendid Table," a Minnesota Public Radio program with Lynne Rossetto Kasper. Beth's books include *It's the Berries* and *Peppers Hot & Sweet*.

Lucia and Beth collaborate on many cooking and writing projects. They wrote *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland* (Knopf).

Mima Lecocq ("Glazed Chicken," p. 31) grew up around great food: her mother was one of the first chefs at Chez Panisse (where Mima got to eat chocolate mousse after school every Wednesday). Though she studied literature, Mima was eventually lured back to the kitchen. She worked as a line cook at Chez Panisse where she met her husband, Tom McNary, with whom she opened *Carried Away*, a takeout shop and catering business.

Clifford A. Wright ("Using Pasta in Soup," p. 34) is the author of five cookbooks, including his most recent, *Italian Pure & Simple* (William Morrow).



Cliff's next book is *A Mediterranean Feast: Celebrated Cuisines from the Merchants of Venice to the Barbary Corsairs*, a comprehensive tome on Mediterranean food

and history to be published by William Morrow in October. In writing about Mediterranean cuisines, Cliff enjoys focusing on the roots of home cooking.

Seen Lippert ("Carrots," p. 38) has been quite busy this year, preparing for the opening of *Metrazur* in Grand Central Terminal in New York City, for which she is the executive chef. Before Matthew Kenney tapped Seen

for this role, she'd opened another restaurant in New York City called *Across the Street*. Before that, she was living in her native California and working at *Chez Panisse*.



After training at the Culinary Institute of America, **Janet Fletcher** ("Slicers," p. 43) honed her cooking skills at *Chez Panisse* in Berkeley, California, and then went on to a successful food writing career. A regular contributor to the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s food section, she's the author of eight cookbooks, including *Fresh from the Farmers' Market* (Chronicle). Janet lives in the Napa Valley, where she's working on a book on the cheese course.

Kay Fahey's first real cooking experience came when the line cook at her mother's restaurant got mad because she wouldn't let him leave to go sky-diving. He left anyway, in the middle of the dinner rush, so Kay learned to cook—*fast*. After that experience, Kay decided what she really wanted to do was write, specifically about food ("Pine Nuts," p. 46). These days she makes her living writing about food, chefs, and restaurants for magazines and newspapers. "I love it," she says. "I get to write my article and eat it, too."

Robert Stehling ("Buttermilk Pie," p. 52) got his start in the kitchen of Bill Neal's *Crook's Corner* restaurant in North Carolina. There he worked his way up from dishwasher to head chef. Next came stints in New York City at *Arizona 206*, *Home*, and *Monkey Bar*, among other great restaurants. But the South beckoned, and a few years ago, Robert left New York to open his own place, *Hominy Grill*, in Charleston, South Carolina.



Paul Bertolli ("Gnocchi," p. 54) is the chef and co-owner of *Oliveto* in Oakland, California. He was the chef at *Chez Panisse* for ten years and cowrote *Chez Panisse Cooking* (Random House) with Alice Waters. When Paul's not behind the stove at *Oliveto*, he channels his passion for the finest ingredients into hunting, fishing, foraging, making balsamic vinegar, and curing his own prosciutto and salami. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Robert Wemischner ("Tamarind," p. 60) loves to explore all of the highly flavored staples of the ethnic pantry. He wrote *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook* (Lowell House) and, with Karen Karp, *Gourmet to Go: A Guide to Opening and Operating a Specialty Food Store* (John Wiley). His next book will be an exploration of cooking with tea, in collaboration with Diana Rosen. In addition to teaching professional baking at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, he lectures widely on entrepreneurship for culinarians.



Joanne Chang ("Coffee Desserts," p. 64) has worked as a pastry chef at some wonderful places: *Payard Pâtisserie* in New York City, and *Rialto* and *Mistral* in Boston. Now she's ready to embark on her own and will soon open her own pastry shop, *Flour*, in Boston.



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READER SERVICE NO. 37

Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.

Three new things from *Fine Cooking*

First, we're happy to include our first special pull-out section, devoted to cooking with spices. Contributing Editor Molly Stevens spent the last few months grinding and toasting and generally making her house smell wonderful as she compiled lots of useful information about how to integrate the allure of spices into your cooking.

Less fragrant, but very welcome to many of you, is our new index on the web. Go to our site (www.finecooking.com), click on FC Index, and then click on a letter or search by keyword to find the issue and page on which a topic, a recipe, an ingredient, or an author appears. By clicking on the issue number, you'll get information on how to order that issue if you don't already own it.

We also want to remind everyone about *Fine Cooking's* California Experience. We're inviting readers to join us October 21–24, 1999, for three days of hands-on classes, seminars, behind-the-scenes tours, customized tastings, and remarkable meals in Sonoma and Napa valleys. We'll be working with artisans and other food professionals, including John Ash, Bill Briwa, Holly Peterson Mondavi, Bellwether Farms cheeses, Artisan Bakery, Kendall-Jackson and Mondavi wineries, and the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. See p. 19 in this issue for our ad.

A boning knife can tackle any carving job

In *Fine Cooking* #30, James Peterson gives excellent advice on carving a roast (p. 22). If we don't have a good carving knife, he

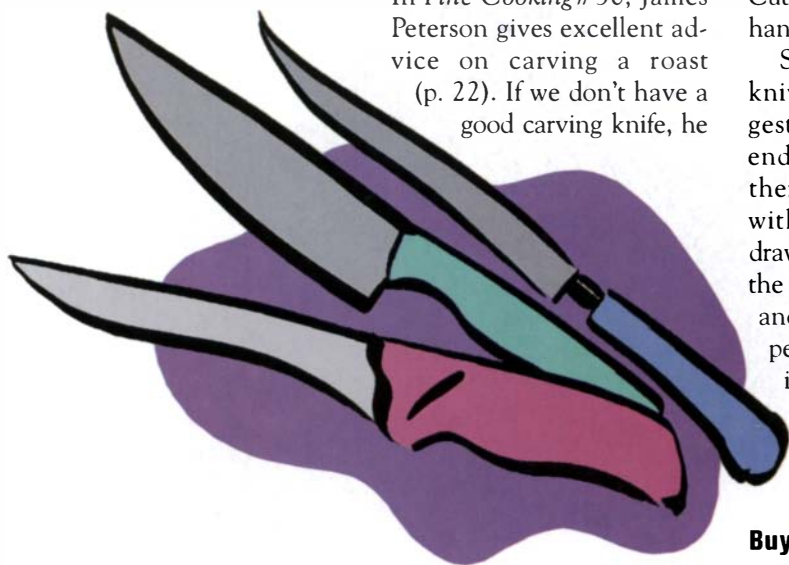
roast to a 20-pound turkey. My favorite brand is Chicago Cutlery, with a big, ergonomic handle.

Still on the subject of knives, a letter-writer suggests sticking corks on the ends of knives and storing them in a drawer. With or without corks, knives in a drawer are bad news, both for the knives that can gouge one another and for any unsuspecting person who reaches into the drawer and gets a nasty cut.

—Frank R. Sherman,
Sudbury, MA

Buying yeast in bulk is a smart move for bakers

A word or two on costs should have been included in your Basics piece on different yeasts (*Fine Cooking* #30, p. 72). I marvel at people being willing to pay 50¢ per



suggests using a chef's knife. But why does everyone ignore the 8-inch, stiff-bladed boning knife? Properly sharpened, it makes short work of any carving job, from a rib

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—John F. Hacking,
via e-mail

The catch of the day?

Your answer to the question "What is scrod?" in *Fine Cooking* #30 (p. 16) is only partially correct. Scrod is an acronym for "school run of the day" and dates back so far that its pedigree is obscure. Hence the (correct) definition of small fish of various types.

—Lois Campbell,
via e-mail

Making great potato pancakes even better

Like the Davises ("Crisp Potato Latkes," *Fine Cooking* #30, p. 42), each Hanukkah finds our house filled with the smells of latkes and other once-a-year-I-love-them treats. I'd only add to their wonderful article and recipe to save the water they extract

from the potatoes, let it sit a few minutes, pour off the clear liquid and add the pasty potato starch to the potato mixture as a thickener. And how about some information about the James Beard Latke Cookoff? Great article. Great magazine.

—the Salkind family,
Lawrence, KS

Editors' reply: The James Beard Foundation holds an annual cookoff (they just started a few years ago) open to professionals and amateurs alike, usually on the first night of Hanukkah. This year the winner was Adam Rapoport, who's a restaurant editor for *Time Out* magazine. His potato pancake was deemed perfectly fried by the panel of judges and by the "audience" at the cookoff. For information on next year's event, and on the Beard Foundation in general, call 800/36-BEARD (800/362-3273).

Divine brine

I would like to comment on the suggestion Mr. Richard Schwaninger made for Roasty Chicken Brine in Letters (*Fine Cooking* #30, p. 10). I tried this method of roasting my chicken, and all I have to say is "WOW!" This may be my best chicken yet.

—Tina L. Smith,
via e-mail

Editors' note: For those who missed Mr. Schwaninger's letter, here's his method again: "To 1 gallon of water, add ¼ cup salt (noniodized is best; iodized may impart a bitter taste), ½ cup sugar, ¼ cup molasses, plus whatever seasonings you like: powdered onion, garlic, etc. Submerge [and refrigerate] the chicken in the solution for 12 to 16 hours. Rinse well and roast as desired.

This works of course for boneless turkey breasts and other poultry parts."

At the Market erratum

In *Fine Cooking* #31's At the Market (p. 14), the photo for Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*) is incorrectly labeled. It's actually a photo of yu-choy, a variety of bok choy, which has a mustardy tang and is delicious stir-fried or steamed. ♦

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that


- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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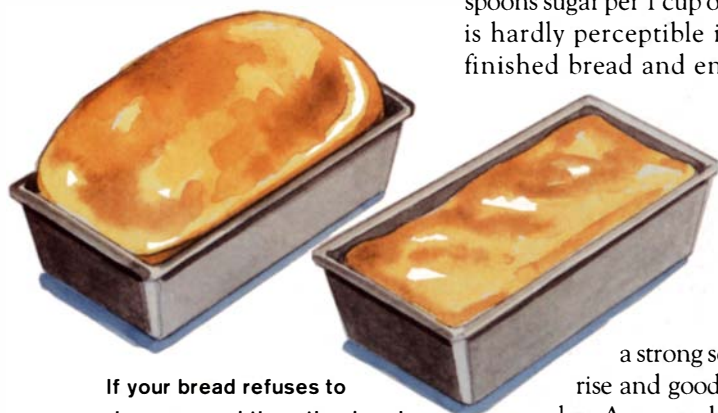
READER SERVICE NO. 56

Bread that won't rise

Sometimes my bread dough won't rise a second time. What might be the cause?

—Jean S. Wexler,
Vineyard Haven, MA

Maggie Glezer replies: Bread-baking problems are tricky to diagnose because a single symptom can have multiple



If your bread refuses to rise a second time, the dough may need more sugar.

causes. If the bread fails to rise a second time—a problem not uncommon among home bakers—it's often because the dough lacks sugar. To explain this, let me back up and discuss how leavening occurs.

When yeast is added to bread dough, it ferments sugar that's found naturally in the flour, that's created by enzymes during fermentation, or that's added as an ingredient to the dough. In the process, the yeast excretes carbon dioxide (as well as ethanol). Initially, the carbon dioxide dissolves into the liquid portion of the dough, but as this liquid becomes saturated, the carbon dioxide evolves into air bubbles that have already been incorporated into the dough during kneading. The bubbles expand due to the increased gas pressure, and this leavens the dough.

If the dough lacks enough sugar (another problem that has several possible causes, among them an overdose of yeast), fermentation ceases, no more carbon dioxide is produced, and the dough stops rising. The simplest solution is just to add sugar, if there isn't any in the recipe. I've found that about 2 teaspoons sugar per 1 cup of flour is hardly perceptible in the finished bread and ensures

a strong second rise and good crust color. An even better, more professional solution is to add diastatic (meaning enzymatically active) malted barley flour instead of sugar. The enzymes in this product will break down some of the starch in the flour into sugars, providing a steady fuel source for the yeast.

Usually about ½ teaspoon malted barley flour per 1 cup flour is enough to give a strong second rise, as well as a wonderful oven spring and a deep brown crust. Use it judiciously: too much will give the bread a sticky, gummy crumb. King Arthur Baker's Catalogue (800/827-6836) carries malted barley flour.

If you're using whole-grain flours, the problem may be that the dough's gluten network has been compromised, which can weaken the second rise. In that case, be sure you shape the dough tightly (if it's in a loaf pan) and carefully (if it's a round loaf), and get the

bread into the oven sooner rather than later.

Maggie Glezer is an American Institute of Baking Certified Baker. Her book on artisan breadbaking is due out this fall.

Smoke point of oils

Which cooking oils have the highest smoke point?

—Minnie Reyes-Helfrich
Birmingham, MI

Shirley O. Corriher replies:

The smoke point of an oil is the temperature at which it begins to smoke and give off acrid smells. (The flash point, which is higher, is when wisps of oil vapors will spontaneously ignite.) When picking an oil for frying, for safety and flavor reasons, choose one with a smoke point well above the planned frying temperature. Most vegetable oils have high smoke points (see the chart below), with some olive oils slightly lower, and animal fats well below the rest.

Smoke points for oils, and solid fats especially, vary quite a bit, so use the accompanying chart as an approximate guide. Olive oil in particular is hard to pin down. As a rule, extra-virgin has a lower smoke point than more refined, or pure, olive oils and shouldn't be used for high-temperature frying. Keep in mind also that an oil's smoke point can drop by 100°F after just one use. Even unused oil that's partially rancid or that hasn't been stored properly will have a lower smoke

point. For maximum shelflife, store oil in a cool, dark place, and try to keep the container full so there's less oxidation and thus less deterioration of the oil.

Shirley Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, wrote CookWise (William Morrow).

Removing chickpea skins

Is it necessary to skin chickpeas? Is there an efficient way to do it?

—Sandra Joffries,
Oak Park, IL

Paula Wolfert responds: Whether you skin chickpeas depends on what you're going to do with them. If they're getting puréed, as for hummus, or being served in a salad, it's no crime to leave on the skins. But for stews, soups, and some sauces, the skins will fall off during cooking and become a visual and textural distraction.

There are many ways to skin a chickpea, but unfortunately none of them works perfectly. A popular method is to plunge just-cooked chickpeas into cold water, dip in

Approximate smoke points for fresh oils and fats

avocado	500°F
almond	500°
safflower	450°
cottonseed	450°
grapeseed	450°
canola	450°
soybean	450°
corn	440°
olive (pure)	410°
peanut	410°
sesame (untoasted)	410°
sunflower	390°
vegetable shortening ...	375°–425°
lard	360°–400°
clarified butter	325°–375°

your hands, and rub the chickpeas between your palms. Most (but not all) of the skins will come off as you rub, and you can discard them as they float to the surface. The Moroccan method is to roll soaked and partially cooked chickpeas around on wide reed baskets until the skins slip off. That inspired my own method, which is to roll partially cooked, drained chickpeas in a rough cloth until the skins come off. Then I return them to the pot and finish cooking. Finally, you can peel chickpeas one by one, a tedious job best done in front of an absorbing TV show. *Paula Wolfert's latest cookbook is Mediterranean Grains & Greens (HarperCollins).*

Freezing cookies

Can all cookies be frozen after baking?

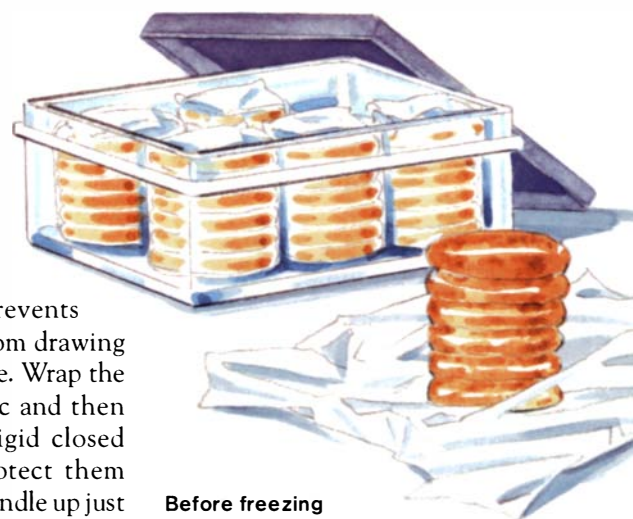
—Nick Margolese,
Brooklyn, NY

Elinor Klivans replies: Almost all cookies are ideal for freezing. They wrap easily, take up little freezer space, and defrost quickly. Cookies also have a relatively low moisture content, which means fewer ice crystals form upon freezing, less melting occurs upon defrosting, and the cookie texture doesn't suffer. The only cookies that won't survive freezing very well are those with fresh fruit fillings (but jam fillings are fine).

To freeze, cool the cookies thoroughly before wrapping

them well. Good packaging keeps cookies in prime condition and prevents dry freezer air from drawing out their moisture. Wrap the cookies in plastic and then put them in a rigid closed container to protect them from breaking. Bundle up just a few cookies in plastic (or even wrap them individually) so they don't pick up off flavors. Delicate cookies must be wrapped carefully and layered flat to prevent breakage. Before wrapping frosted cookies or bars, freeze them unwrapped until the frosting is firm.

Defrost cookies while still wrapped so that condensation forms on the wrapping, not on



Before freezing cookies, let them cool and then wrap them carefully.

the cookie. Frosted and filled cookies will last for a month in the freezer. Most other cookies, bars, and brownies will last up to three months.

Elinor Klivans is the author of 125 Cookies to Bake, Nibble & Savor (Broadway Books). ♦

 A large, high-quality photograph of a KitchenAid spoon resting on the rim of a dark pan. The spoon's handle is silver and has the "KitchenAid" logo engraved on it. The background is a solid red color.

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Handmade bread and jam by mail

Remember Della Fattoria, the family-run bakery we profiled in “Life at the Speed of Bread” (*Fine Cooking* #27, p. 69)? If reading about those hearth-baked, hand-crafted breads made you yearn for them, you’ll be glad to know that now you can get them by mail. Della Fattoria and Katz & Company, makers of handmade preserves and honey (*Fine Cooking* #16, p. 92), will send a bread and jam breakfast right to your door. Thanks to organic, stone-ground flour, natural starter, and a long rise, Della Fattoria breads have an unusually long life (at least three to four days), and they freeze beautifully. It’s hard to think of a more delicious breakfast than this box of honey, apricot jam, and breads (from left, levain, brandied currant, and pullman), which would be great for a big gathering. Cost is \$65, shipping varies. To order, call 800/676-7176 five days in advance.

—Amy Albert, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*

A salad spinner that stays in place

A few things set Oxo Good Grips’ charming new salad spinner apart. Instead of a string or a handle to turn, the spinner has a pump mechanism that works like a top. Push on it and the interior basket holding the greens spins and spins. It also has a rubber-trimmed bottom that keeps the spinner in place while it spins. Combine the two features and you’ve got a salad spinner that you can set spinning and then walk away from. Once upon a time I’d have thought that the minute or so of free time this gives you doesn’t amount to much. But as the working mother of a toddler, I now appreciate anything that lets me do two things at once. So while my salad spins dry, I can start a vinaigrette.

A feature that amused my engineer husband is the black brake button on top of the spinner. Sure enough, the spinner comes to a halt when you press on it.

My only complaint is storage. Oxo has wisely designed the pump, which protrudes from the spinner, so it can be locked into its down position. But the lock on one spinner I tried was frustratingly stubborn. This was surprising coming from a company that has won design awards from the Arthritis Foundation. The lock on another spinner proved easier to move, but it still takes some getting used to.

The spinner is \$24.99 at kitchen shops (call 800/545-4411 for a retailer near you). Or order it from Crate & Barrel (800/323-5461).

—Joanne McAllister Smart, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*



Fresh French mayonnaise is a versatile base

Delouis Fils traditional French mayonnaise is much more than a simple condiment for binding tuna salad. Made with just egg yolks (most commercial brands use whole eggs), safflower oil, lemon juice, and a good shot of Dijon mustard, Delouis mayonnaise is indistinguishable from the best homemade mayonnaise. With its luxuriously smooth texture, ivory color, and rich, tangy flavor, it’s a perfect accompaniment for sliced meats, poached fish, and crudit —but that’s just for starters.

Dress it up with some chopped capers, minced garlic, pur ed chipotle peppers, curry powder, horseradish, or tomato pur e to make all kinds of dips, spreads, and sauces. (Because of its rather pronounced mustard character, I found that it goes best with assertive flavorings.) I also love its dense consistency,

which means I can stir in a bit of heavy cream, yogurt, citrus juice, or lightly whipped cream to make any number of dressings. I was even inspired to resurrect the classic French technique of whisking a little warm broth into a bit of mayonnaise to make a creamy, light sauce for vegetables, poultry, and fish. And, by the way, this mayonnaise makes a killer tuna sandwich, too.

Delouis Fils is sold in a 12-ounce tub for about \$4 and should be kept refrigerated at all times. Unopened, it has a four- to five-month shelf life (the lid carries a “use by” date); once opened, it should be used within a month. Look for Delouis in Trader Joe’s, Dean & DeLuca, Hay Day/Sutton Place, Balducci’s, and Whole Foods Markets. Or call Pierre Charpentier, Independent French Manufacturers, at 718/596-1313.

—Molly Stevens, contributing editor, *Fine Cooking*



Kitchen Idea Book is packed with information

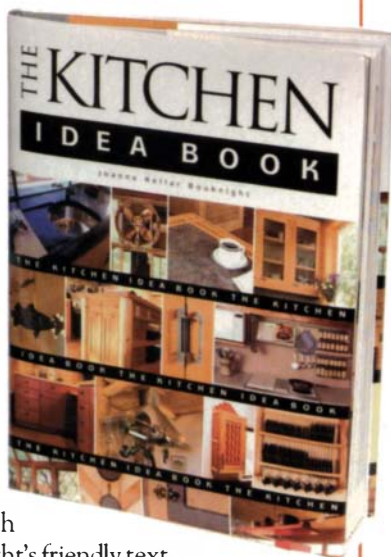
Ever since my husband and I decided to build a house, I've become a kitchen-book junkie. Little did I know my own employer, The Taunton Press, would come out with what is close to being the ultimate kitchen book. *The Kitchen Idea Book* is beautiful to look at, and it's packed with practical information, too.

It's hard not to love the nearly 500 color photographs of well-designed kitchens and smart kitchen features in this book. Just sampling this visual feast is satisfying: you immediately see features you like and those you wouldn't bother with. But I was also impressed with architect-author Joanne Kellar Bouknicht's friendly text and detailed captions, which coax you to think about the smallest of details. And because the book is organized into chapters and subchapters (all labeled with colored tabs), you can pick a subject to immerse yourself in.

For example, in the chapter on countertops and backsplashes, you can first view kitchens with stainless-steel, stone, laminate, tile, concrete, and solid-surface countertops. Then you can examine Bouknicht's helpful watercolor illustrations of important details like comfortable countertop heights for different kitchen tasks or how solid surface and laminate countertops can be integrated with backsplashes. The illustrations help you see another perspective (underneath, behind, or inside) of the building blocks in a kitchen. Sidebars, captions, and tips throughout give plenty of information to start the decision process. (Sources and design information for every color photo are listed at the back of the book.)

To order, call 800/243-7252 or visit www.taunton.com.

—Susie Middleton, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*



Cyberkitchen: Web sites for design help and product info

If you're planning a kitchen renovation, or even if you just need a new dishwasher, plenty of sites on the Internet offer great information. Start with www.nkba.org. The National Kitchen & Bath Association's site has photos of award-winning kitchens, guidelines for kitchen design, and a list of kitchen designers in your area. Next, check www.kitchen-bath.com for details and reviews of specific appliances and cabinets. Then take advantage of manufacturers' web sites. My fantasy favorites include www.viking-range.com (killer cooktops), www.crown-point.com (custom cabinets), www.ge.com (Monogram appliances), www.subzero.com (refrigeration units), and www.dupont.com (Corian).

Restaurant-size wraps are a smart idea for home cooks

After working in restaurants, I made a few permanent changes to the line-up of supplies in my home kitchen. One of the most efficient (and economic) ideas I got from professional kitchens is to use those giant boxes of food wrap. In these boxes, foil and plastic wrap come in lengths of 500 or 1000 feet, so they last forever (I'm still using the 1000-foot box of plastic wrap I bought two years ago). What I like most about these boxes is their sturdiness: because they stay put on a countertop, they act almost like a second set of hands while you extend plastic or foil tightly over a bowl. And if you're a caterer, or if you frequently prepare large amounts of food to store ahead or to transport, you'll appreciate the fact that you can wrap to your heart's content in a very secure fashion. While you do have to watch out for the sharp cutting edge on these boxes, you won't have to deal with the nasty problem of sticking wrap that won't unroll properly.

These wraps used to be sold only in restaurant-supply stores. Now the Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232) carries the freezer- and microwave-safe plastic wrap (12 inches x 1,000 feet for \$12.99; 18 inches x 1,000 feet, \$19.99) and the aluminum foil (12 inches x 500 feet, \$29.99; 18 inches x 500 feet, \$39.99), as well as packages of the foil sheets that delis use (\$9.99 for 200 sheets). These "deli" wraps are terrifically convenient; I wind up grabbing a sheet or two out of the box every night for something (to line a baking sheet, make a steaming pouch, tent a resting roast). Reynolds Wrap is also packaging them for home cooks; they're available in grocery stores (\$1.99 for a box of 50 sheets).

—S. M.



Salad Greens Bring Spring Freshness to Your Kitchen

Mizuna is an Asian green that's sweet and mild; its flavor is a cross between sweet cabbage and apple. Mizuna's jagged leaves range from 3 to 8 inches long. Toss them with lettuces and other greens for a wonderful flavor lift in mixed salads.



When I crave a light, satisfying meal with vibrant flavors, I think of a big, colorful salad. A mix of greens brightens up the grayness of winter, and it's a sign of the green spring to come.

Lettuce leaves are juicy with a sweet taste; they can have a crisp or satiny texture, depending on the variety. And over the last ten years, many varieties of leafy greens have become easier to find for

salads. Italian arugula and Asian mizuna offer peppery notes, while other lettuces, like mâche, are almost nutty and buttery tasting. Mesclun mixes are blends of various kinds of seasonal young leaves; you can buy them in bulk or already bagged.

With a wider range of lettuces now available at local markets, I don't limit myself to simple side-dish salads: often, I'll make a salad the center-

piece of lunch or dinner. I assemble these main-dish salads, tossing tender lettuces with citrus or sliced stone fruits, slivered nuts, cheeses such as crumbled feta or Gorgonzola, and thin slices of grilled lamb, beef, or chicken.

Lettuces thrive in cool weather

Lettuces and other salad greens are fast-growing plants that thrive in cool tempera-

Romaine lettuce heads should feel heavy and tight. Romaine is crunchy, juicy, and sweet, with substantial body; the leaves stand up well to punchy dressings, and they're a great choice for whole-meal salads with lots of ingredients. Because they stay crisp, romaine leaves are good in sandwiches, too.



Arugula, also called **rucola**, **rocket**, or **roquette**, has elongated oak-leaf-shaped leaves that can be baby-size (about 3 inches) or full-size (about 7). I think younger, smaller leaves taste best; older, bigger ones can be too strong for my liking. Arugula's unique peppery-sweet flavor adds zing to any salad. It's especially good paired with fresh stone fruits like peaches or nectarines, or combined with crisped, crumbled bacon, a julienne of ham, or crumbled feta.



Leaf or cutting lettuce has an open, loose head and leaf shapes that range from notched and scalloped to frilly and ruffy. Varieties run from bright green to cranberry and burgundy, many with red tips and pale green leaf bases. Individual leaves are generally thinner than other varieties of lettuces, so use them promptly, because they don't keep. Leaf lettuce is a good all-purpose choice for salads and sandwiches.

Iceberg or crisphead lettuce deserves another chance after suffering from a few decades of disrepute. Look for heads with unblemished outer leaves that are firm and heavy for their size; use promptly for best flavor. In farmers' markets look for Batavian varieties, whose looser-headed, deeper-colored leaves have the same satisfying crunch. This thick, juicy-sweet lettuce may taste somewhat bland, but its crunchy texture is just right in Tex-Mex tacos, Chinese chicken salad, or cut into wedges and topped with blue cheese dressing.



tures and in well-drained soil with ample moisture.

Thanks to the cool, mild growing climates of coastal California, lettuces and other salad greens are available all over the country, even in the dead of winter. In the spring and fall, though, search out locally grown salad greens.

Look for heads or leafy rosettes that are dense and heavy for their size. Leaves should be unblemished. Avoid limp specimens or heads that have brown-edged or brown-spotted leaves or hollow centers—this usually indicates poor handling after harvest. Skip

soggy-looking heads with flaccid leaves that have been doused with too much water at the market in an attempt to make them look perkier.

Green salads are a great foil for gray weather.

Keep lettuces and greens in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator. This way, they'll enjoy higher humidity and stay fresh a bit longer. The new ventilated plastic bags made especially for vegetables

are great for storing greens. That said, try to use salad greens within a few days of purchase; they'll lose

their texture and body if stored longer than that. (For other tips on storing lettuce, see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 73. For tips on making a simple green salad, see *Fine Cooking* #21, p. 14.)

Renee Shepherd is a longtime gardening cook and seed cataloguer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries nationwide. ♦



Curly endive, also called **frisée**, has lacy leaves and crisp ribs. The leaves add crunchy texture and body to the salad bowl. Look for smaller young rosettes the size of a large fist, as these are milder and more juicy than bigger, more mature ones. If very big heads are all you can find, remove the deeper green outer leaves and use the more blanched, tender-crisp hearts.



Butterhead, Boston, or Bibb lettuce, also called **limestone lettuce**, grows in softly folding heads known for their good flavor and buttery texture.

Color ranges from pale lime to a more medium green. The succulent leaves surround satiny delicate hearts; you'll find varieties both with loose open heads and with tighter heads. I love to toss Bibb into a salad of toasted chopped walnuts, crumbled blue cheese, and sliced ripe pears.



Mâche, also known as **cornsalad** or **lamb's lettuce**, is an early-spring crop. The oval leaves grow in small, fist-size rosettes that look like little bouquets. Mâche has a velvety texture and delicate taste; it needs no elaborate dressing. Try mâche tossed with toasted walnuts or hazelnuts and a simple vinaigrette; top with finely chopped hard-cooked egg.

Mesclun traditionally contained the season's first greens but it has come to mean a varied mixture of young salad greens. At the market, you'll find mesclun mixes bagged or in bulk. They'll include a wide range of greens, including various lettuces, Asian greens, radicchio, young chard or kale, wild greens, or leafy herbs like chervil. Look for mixes with a good variety of fresh, young leaves. Avoid those that are mostly just chopped-up lettuces, which turn slimy all too quickly. Mesclun offers a tempting combination of colors, textures, and flavors, and it's best with a simple vinaigrette that doesn't overwhelm its subtle flavors and textures.



Escarole is an underappreciated cold-weather green. Crunchy-sweet with great texture, it keeps well and stands up to heavy dressings; it's a great bed for main-dish salads. Peel away any tough outer leaves and use the tender, pale, succulent inner ones.



Ordering Wine in a Restaurant

Even for a seasoned restaurant goer, one of the most potentially awkward aspects of wine is ordering from a list in a restaurant. But even though you're dealing with a long list of unfamiliar wines and a waiter standing there waiting to take your order, you shouldn't have to feel intimidated. With a little knowledge of protocol and how wine lists are structured, you'll confidently enjoy even the most formal wine service.

Set a price limit to narrow the field

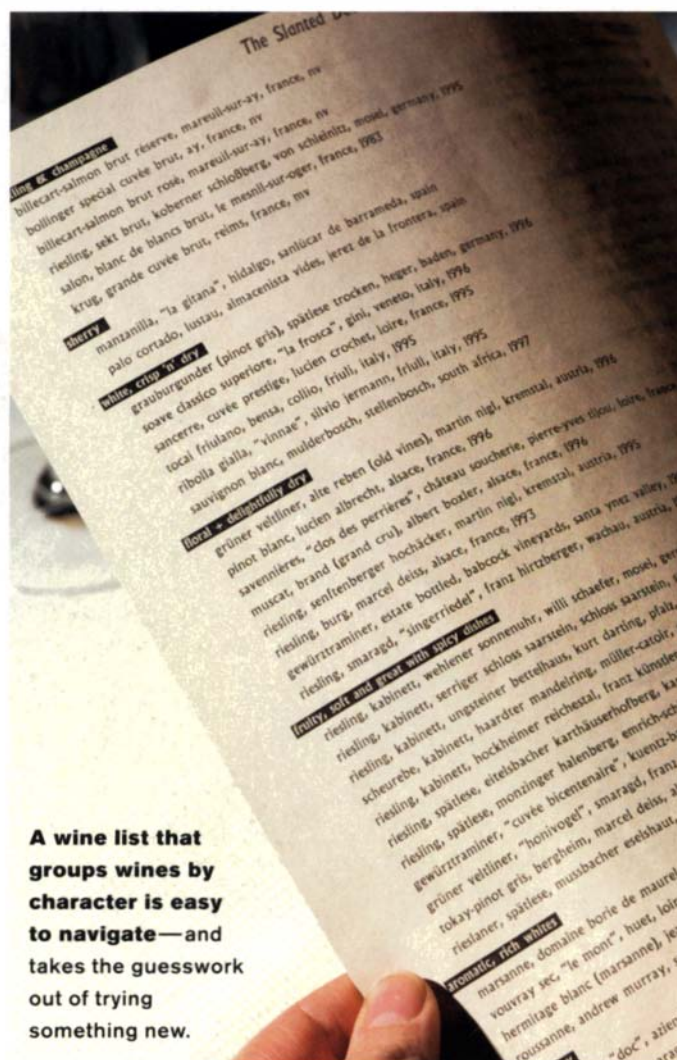
Wine lists vary in size from one-pagers to thick tomes. They can be organized by color, region, grape varietal, price range, or even character, such as fruity or herbal. Before you get down to ordering, give the list a quick once-over to see how it's set up. A list arranged by varietal or character, like the list at right, is particularly easy to follow, especially when deciding on a good match for the food you're ordering.

Have a figure in mind, but be aware that the server's job is to sell. Your request for a good \$25 Chardonnay might be met with suggestions for slightly higher priced wines. Stand firm, but be open to spending a few dollars more if your server suggests something that sounds like a good value. The best buys on a wine list tend to fall between \$18 and \$35, and many restaurants have their staff members taste wines every day so they can recommend them with confidence.

Be aware that most restaurants mark up a bottle of wine 2½ times the wholesale cost; in other words, a bottle that costs \$10 wholesale would cost about \$15 in a wine store and should appear on a restaurant wine list for about \$25. To tell if a wine list

practical for the restaurant to mark them up 250%.

That mark-up may seem extreme, but running a good restaurant involves lots of overhead costs, and it's practically impossible to survive without marking up wines and spirits at some sort of profit.



A wine list that groups wines by character is easy to navigate—and takes the guesswork out of trying something new.

is reasonably priced, use that formula as a starting point but not as a hard and fast rule. Wines such as vintage Champagnes or classified Bordeaux tend to have such a high wholesale cost that it's im-

Unfortunately, some restaurants are guilty of marking up wines 300% and higher. If you think that a restaurant's list is too expensive, politely mention it to the management and never go back. (Chances are

you'll tell all your friends how expensive the wine list was, and that's some of the worst publicity for any restaurant).

Decide on the food you're going to order, and discuss your choices with the wine waiter. If you and your companions are eating varied foods, you usually have a couple of options: compromise on a more "all-purpose" wine, such as a lighter red; order a couple of different half bottles, or choose from the by-the-glass selection. If a few diners want a glass of the same wine, it's usually cheaper to order a full bottle, which contains about five glasses (depending on the size of the glass).

Mention specific wines that you enjoy; for example, "I like Pinot Gris from King Estate in Oregon—do you carry it, or can you recommend something similar?" If the server can't help you, ask for someone who can. The wine buyer or sommelier will know the list inside out. Aside from being able to choose the right wine, she or he can also point out the best values on the list.

Formal or casual, there's a basic protocol

Although styles of wine service vary from formal to casual, there are a few basics that should always take place when a bottle is opened at the table.

The server should repeat your order twice, once when the order is taken and again when the bottle is brought to the table. This ensures that you're getting the right bottle.

The server should present the bottle to you, unopened, so you can see the label clearly. Never accept an opened bottle—you may not be getting the wine you or-

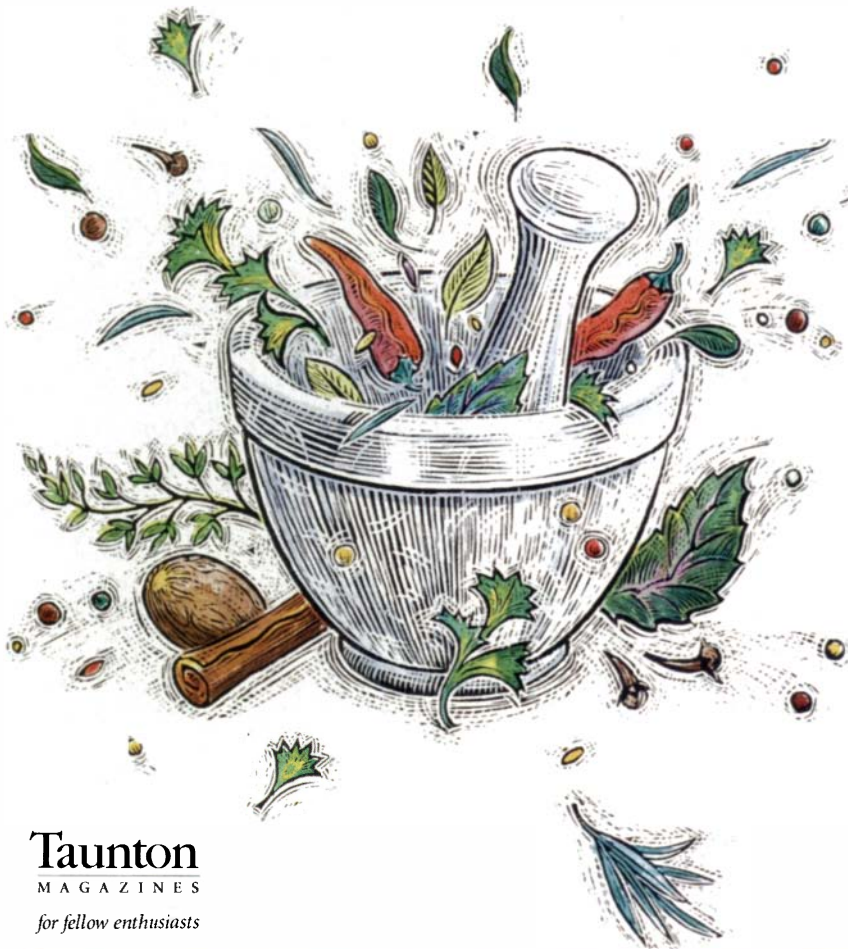
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dered. Be sure to inspect the vintage on the label. Some restaurants stock several different vintages of a certain wine, and the prices may vary widely.

The server should present the cork to you, laying it on a coaster or underliner plate right after the wine is opened. (Proper wine service dictates that the cork shouldn't touch the table.) Smell the cork. If there's a wet, moldy cardboard smell, the wine is probably "corked"; tasting will confirm this (you'll also get a wet, moldy-basement flavor). Corkiness happens when the chlorine from the processing of raw corks isn't completely removed and comes into contact with any number of molds. The result is trichloroanisole, or TCA, a substance that can ruin a bottle of wine.

Proper wine service states that the person who ordered the wine is the taster. If the diner who ordered doesn't want to taste, it's perfectly fine to ask the server to pour the taste for others at the table.

So now the server pours a little wine in the glass. Here's where you might not be sure how to respond. Swirl, sniff, and take a sip. If the wine is fine, a nod and a thank you suffice nicely; no need for any more comment on the wine.

If you think something is wrong with the wine after tasting it, mention it to your server. Have the server try it (if allowed), and even get a second opinion from the manager or wine buyer if you think it's necessary. Proper wine service demands that if you're not happy with the wine, it should be taken away immediately without question. Any good restaurant should then offer you another bottle of the

same wine or show you the list so you can choose another bottle. Moreover, you should

**Swirl, sniff, and sip.
If the wine is fine,
a nod and a thank you
suffice nicely.**

never be questioned, charged for a bottle you turned down, or made to feel uncomfortable about rejecting a bottle. It's a

question of business sense: it costs a restaurateur four times as much to get a new diner into the restaurant as it does to get someone to return, so it's sensible to do anything within reason to make an unhappy diner happy. That said, it's in very poor taste to reject bottles just for the sake of impressing someone.

Some restaurants let you bring your own wine. In that case, expect to pay a corkage fee, which can range from \$5 to \$20, depending on

the restaurant. As a good-will gesture, it never hurts to let the server or sommelier taste your wine if it's a special bottle. As for tipping, I always tip on the amount I would have spent on a bottle, or the cost of an average bottle on the restaurant's list. The idea is that the server shouldn't be penalized for your bringing in your own bottle.

Master Sommelier Tim Gaiser selects wine and answers questions for *Virtual Vineyards*, an online wine retailer (www.virtualvin.com). ♦

Red Wines		
Beaujolais & Gamay Noir		
501	1996 Beaujolais-Villages Antoine Descombes	18.00
233	1995 Willakenzie Gamay Noir	33.00
California Zinfandel		
407	1995 Vigil "Tres Condados"	25.00
408	1996 Ridge "Geyerville"	48.00
409	1996 Ravenswood "Sonoma"	38.00
410	1996 Robert Biale "Old Crane Vineyard"	52.00
411	1995 Ravenswood "Wood Road-Beloni"	48.00
412	1996 Ravenswood Monte Rosso	58.00
413	1996 Rabbit Ridge Sonoma	28.00
414	1996 Mount Veeder	42.00
415	1995 Steele "Pacini Vineyard"	48.00
416	1996 Hardford Court	45.00
417	1995 Storybook	68.00
418		28.00
Rhone Reds & Their Relatives		
550	1994 Chapoutier Chateaufort-Du-Pape "Le Bernardine"	55.00
552	1994 Chapoutier Hermitage "La Sizeranne"	90.00
288	1994 Shooting Star Grenache Washington	26.00
289	1995 Glen Fiona Grenache Noir Washington	29.00
290	1994 McCrea "Tierra del Sol" Syrah/Grenache Washington	35.00
291	1995 Columbia Syrah Washington	43.00
419	1994 Markham Petite Syrah	
420	1995 Stags Leap Petite Syrah, Napa	
422	1995 Zaca Mesa Syrah California	
Chianti, Sangiovese & "Super Tuscans"		
	Chianti Classico Riserva	

This list groups wines by varietal and region, with similarly styled blends and varietals nearby.

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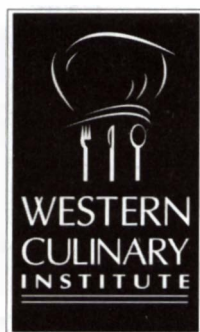
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How to sauté mushrooms so they're browned and flavorful

Many of us have enjoyed delicious, golden brown sautéed mushrooms in restaurants. They show up alongside steaks, in salads, or on top of polenta. But when we sauté mushrooms at home, we end up with a soggy mess. What's wrong?

Moisture is the problem; high heat is the solution

All foods contain water that's released when the food is heated. The goal in sautéing (to develop a savory crust on the food) is only achieved if the water evaporates quickly, the instant it's released. Mushrooms, especially cultivated white mushrooms, are hard to sauté because they release so much water. But there are

Sautéed mushrooms make a delicious topping for bruschetta. Adding herbs and garlic or shallot punches up the flavor.



tricks to sautéing all mushrooms so they're deliciously browned and full of flavor. Most important is high heat, which encourages quick evaporation. If the heat isn't high enough, mushrooms boil and steam in their own released moisture rather than brown.

"Wild" mushrooms sauté drier

Creminis and certain "wild" mushrooms, such as shiitakes

(most of which are now cultivated), morels, and chanterelles, contain less water than white mushrooms do. Not only are wild mushrooms more flavorful, but because they contain less water, they're also easier to sauté.

Hardly any prep work is needed. Before sautéing your mushrooms, clean off any excess dirt. Contrary to what most people think, you *can* rinse mushrooms. Just rinse

them lightly with water in a colander; don't soak them or they'll absorb too much water. Dry them with paper towels and wipe off any stubborn dirt.

If the stems of your mushrooms seem dry, hard, or slimy, trim just that part off; otherwise just leave the stems intact. Shiitakes are the exception: their leathery stems don't soften, so they should be cut off where they join the

Sauté mushrooms in small batches for a golden, savory crust



Throw a handful of mushrooms into a hot pan filmed with oil. Don't toss or stir the mushrooms until they start to brown, after a minute or two.



When the mushrooms are evenly browned, push them to the side and add more. Brown these and repeat the process until all the mushrooms are browned. Continue cooking until the mushrooms are well browned and there's no liquid left in the pan.



Add flavor with a sprinkling of minced garlic and chopped parsley. Cook for another minute or two, tossing to coat the mushrooms evenly. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

cap. (You can save the stems to flavor stocks and sauces.)

Cut your mushrooms on the thick side and try to keep their shape. As mushrooms release their moisture, they shrink. If you start with very thinly sliced mushrooms, they'll shrivel down to nothing before they brown. Don't slice cultivated mushrooms thinner than ¼ inch. You can also cut them in half or quarters from top to bottom for a meatier bite.

I like to cook wild mushrooms whole, but if they're very large or need to be combined with other mushrooms or ingredients, I cut them into pieces that follow their natural contours.

Cook in batches for best results

I sauté mushrooms only a handful at a time, making sure the mushrooms have browned before pushing them aside and adding more. Don't worry about the mushrooms you added to the pan first: they won't be in the pan long enough to overcook.

Start with a heavy pan. A heavy pan not only provides even heat, it also retains heat, so its temperature won't drop very much when you start putting food into the pan.

Get the pan hot. Before you put anything in the pan, heat the pan over high heat. If you're using oil or clarified butter, heat the fat until it ripples and barely begins to smoke—you want to hear the mushrooms sizzle when they hit the pan. (If you're using whole butter, heat it until the butter is frothy.) Cook the mushrooms a handful at a time. Don't add the next handful until the first has

browned and there's no liquid left in the bottom of the pan.

If the mushrooms release a lot of liquid in the pan, just keep cooking. You can cook all the mushrooms at one time, but because a lot of mushrooms will lower the temperature of the pan, you'll wind up with a lot of liquid in the pan. If this happens, just continue cooking the mushrooms until the water boils away. Some liquid will evaporate and some gets reabsorbed into the mushrooms, which gives the mushrooms a rich flavor even though they were never actually sautéed.

A few easy ways to add flavor

The fat you use is the first way you can add flavor. Butter tastes great, but it's tricky because it burns at a lower temperature. Clarified butter, on the other hand, works beautifully. Olive oil adds a lovely, fruity flavor, but I don't recommend using extra-virgin olive oil because the high heat eliminates any of the nuances of this more expensive grade. For even more flavor, you can sauté mushrooms in duck fat, lard, or the fat rendered from bacon or pancetta.

Deglaze the pan to capture the most flavor. You can deglaze the pan, where some of the mushroom flavor is now clinging, with flavorful liquids, such as sherry, wine, stock, or cream. Add a couple of tablespoons of liquid while the heat is still on high; keep stirring to scrape up the browned mushroom juices until the liquid has completely evaporated.

Garlic, shallots, and herbs give the mushrooms some zing. French cooks are espe-

Cook a panful of mushrooms until the water is released and then evaporated



Mushrooms crowded in a pan will release a lot of water. Keep the heat on high as the mushrooms cook to evaporate the liquid quickly.



Keep cooking until all the water is gone. At this point, you can deglaze the pan with a little liquid, such as sherry, stock, or cream. Use a spoon to scrape up the flavorful browned juices on the bottom of the pan.

cially fond of mushrooms and like to sprinkle them with garlic, shallots, or herbs during sautéing to give them an extra burst of flavor. Chopped shallots can be added about halfway into sautéing; added too soon, they may burn; added too late, they'll taste raw. Finely minced garlic is best added toward the end. I like to mix finely chopped

garlic, parsley, and sometimes breadcrumbs (a mixture the French call a *persillade*) to sautéing mushrooms. I also like shallots and thyme.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of Vegetables (William Morrow). He's currently writing a book on cooking techniques. ♦

Do you have a shortcut for a time-consuming cooking task, a novel use for an old kitchen tool, or an unusual way to stay organized in the kitchen? Write to **Tips**, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Squeeze spinach between plates

Another way to squeeze excess moisture from cooked spinach: Set the cooked spinach on a plate in a fairly even layer, and set an identical plate on top (bottom side down, as you would stack them in the cupboard). Press the two plates together while holding them vertically over the sink. This method is more efficient than squeezing the spinach handful by handful, and, for those with severe arthritis, it's also less painful.

—Pamela A. Kuniecki,
Park Hall, MD

Test for doneness with bamboo skewers

Instead of using a paring knife to check the doneness of vegetables like boiled potatoes, I use a bamboo skewer (the kind used for kebabs). I just push the skewer through whatever I'm cooking—it goes all the way through without breaking anything in half. I also use the skewers to check baked goods.

—Lauren Kiino,
San Francisco

Tongs and their myriad uses

I use my spring-loaded tongs to pull out the hot oven rack to check on a dish because they let me grab the rack more securely than a stiff potholder does, and they allow me to keep my distance from the oven's heat. Of course, I also use the tongs for things like turning a piece of meat without puncturing it,



Sandwich cooked spinach between plates to squeeze out moisture.

sautéing vegetables, or gripping a single piece of ziti to check for doneness. To my mind, tongs are the next best thing to having heatproof hands (now *that* would be a great invention).

—Susie Madison,
Stuart, FL

Practice makes a perfect flip

I've often admired the way professional chefs toss food in their skillets with just a flick of the wrist. To practice that technique at home, fill a zip-top bag with food (rice or dried beans work well) and toss the weighted bag in a skillet until you feel confident enough to try it with real food.

—Anthony Lucas,
Toledo, OH

Cool surface before working with pastry

To cool your counter or board for working with pastry, keep a baking sheet full of ice on the surface until you're ready to mix, shape, or roll out your dough. Be sure to wipe off

any condensation before you start to work.

—Tim Derikson,
Houston

Toast spices in foil to prevent burning

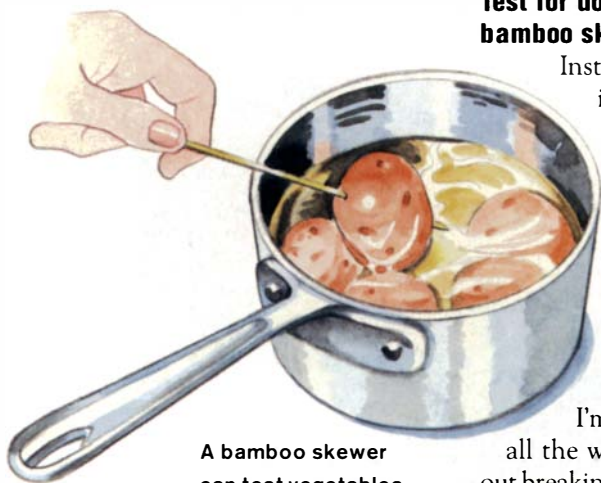
I have a neater method to toast spices in a skillet. Instead of putting the spices directly in the skillet, fold them into an aluminum-foil packet and then heat the packet in the skillet. After five minutes, open and sniff. The spices are ready when you smell their aroma. Return the packet to the skillet for another few minutes if necessary.

This method makes particular sense for toasting saffron, which burns easily and which is used in such small quantities that it seems like half of it never finds its way out of the skillet.

—Susan Asanovic,
Wilton, CT

A second life for vanilla beans

After infusing a custard or sauce with a vanilla bean and scraping out the seeds, I bury the bean in a jar of white sugar. Over time, a pleasing vanilla flavor and aroma seeps into the sugar, which can then be used for anything



A bamboo skewer can test vegetables for doneness without breaking them.



A tray full of ice set on your countertop or cutting board cools the surface for pastry work.

from baking desserts to making applesauce to sweetening your coffee.

—Gwen Flanagan,
Bakersfield, CA

Freeze stock in flat sheets

I measure my stock into heavy-duty freezer bags and then lay the bags on the floor of my freezer so the stock hardens in flat sheets. I can stand the sheets on edge (they're space-efficient) or pile other food on top of them. Since the bag assumes the shape of the liquid, I can freeze any amount of stock and not waste precious freezer space. The stock thaws more quickly than when frozen in plastic tubs, and I can control

how much stock I melt.

Fill each bag about one-third full, press out excess air,



Stocks and sauces frozen flat in plastic bags store neatly in the freezer.

seal it, and wipe off moisture from the exterior. To keep the bags from freezing to the floor of the freezer, lay a sheet of waxed paper, parchment, or freezer paper under the bags. This method of freezing also makes sense for many sauces.

—Megan Whalen Turner,
Silver Spring, MD

Cookbook stays flat and clean in plastic bag

When I need to keep a cookbook open, I slip the open book into a large (or extra-large) zip-top plastic bag. This keeps the book flat and protects it from inevitable spills.

—Billie L. Porter,
Newburyport, MA



For quickly minced ginger, fold ginger slices in plastic wrap and strike them with a meat mallet.

Mince ginger without a knife

To mince ginger finely in less than a second, I peel and slice coins of ginger, put the coins on a piece of plastic wrap, fold over the plastic to cover, and then I strike the ginger with a meat mallet.

—Leslie Revsin,
author of
Great Fish, Quick,
Bronxville, NY ♦



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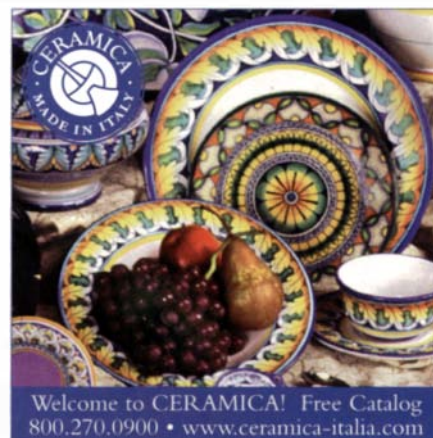
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Authors Lucia Watson (left) and Beth Dooley share KP duty.

Potatoes as the Main Event

They're earthy, they're filling, and—paired with the right ingredients—they make a great main dish

BY BETH DOOLEY & LUCIA WATSON

Fluffy mashed potatoes are key to a good shepherd's pie



Start with very well cooked potatoes. Don't be afraid to go a little overboard—the potatoes should fall apart. Be sure to drain them well.



Add cream and butter slowly as you mash. Lucia Watson likes a hand masher, but a food mill is fine, too.

Photos except where noted: Martha Heintzberg

What turns a potato into a main dish rather than a side dish? Partly just your attitude. We're all so used to thinking of potatoes as a "side" to accompany meat or chicken, but in fact their earthy flavor and substantial nature make potatoes a perfect choice to be the center of the meal. Even though we've both been known to eat just a bowl of buttery mashed potatoes or a baked potato with sour cream for dinner, to make potatoes truly feel like a main dish, they have to be paired with the right ingredients. They need to lose their neutral nature and become more complex in flavor and texture.

One way to do this is by cutting through the starchiness with fresh, sharp ingredients, such as the bell peppers, garlic, and lemon in our Braised Potatoes & Vegetables with Garlic, Spices & Cilantro (p. 29), or the chives, radishes, green beans, and vinaigrette in the New Potato Salad with Spring Vegetables & Shrimp (p. 28).

You can also enrich potatoes with cheese, cream, or butter (or all three; check out our Potato & Leek Gratin, p. 30). Because potatoes are so starchy, they can accept quite a bit of richness without becoming cloying.

Some people might like to add a small amount of protein, such as the ham in our gratin or the shrimp in the salad. But you can go completely vegetarian; as long as you have some complexity in the flavors, the dish feels just right as a main dish.

Starch content makes a difference to the cook

Generally, potatoes fall into two categories, high starch and low starch.

Potatoes with a high starch content are drier, mealier, more floury when cooked. They also tend to fall apart, so they're not suited to dishes in which you want them to retain their shape, such as salads or gratins. High-starch potatoes make great baking potatoes and are also good for deep-frying. Some cooks like to use them for mashing, as they become light and fluffy (just don't overwork them, or they'll get gluey).

Low starch potatoes are definitely wetter and waxier. They hold a clean shape, even when cooked until very tender. And they'll produce dense, creamy mashed potatoes, as opposed to fluffy ones.

We actually prefer a medium starch variety, such as Yukon Gold (which are in all the grocery stores now) or Yellow Finn, for mashed potatoes and many other dishes, too. These varieties have a great nutty flavor. They're good for baking, giving a nice dry result, but they also hold their shape fairly well and can tolerate boiling or simmering.

New potatoes are not a separate group, but the new crop of any potato. Generally speaking, they're lower in starch than their mature relatives. Size isn't necessarily an indicator of newness, as new potatoes range from marble- to golfball-size. New potatoes don't keep very long, losing their appeal quickly. Keep



Pile the potatoes loosely on the filling for a more appealing, fluffy look.



Rich and earthy, shepherd's pie is what you want for dinner tonight. This nontraditional version (no lamb) has a mushroom and asparagus filling.

How starchy is that potato?



You can see the difference between high and low starch potatoes when you bake them: the low starch variety at far left is dense, moist, and chunky after baking, while the high starch one is fluffier and drier. If you're not sure how much starch a potato has, cut it with a sharp knife. If there's a lot of milky liquid on the blade and it feels like the potato is grabbing the knife, the potato is a high starch one.

true new potatoes in a brown paper bag in the refrigerator for a few days.

And keep all potatoes away from light. Both sunlight and artificial light can cause potatoes to turn green just under the skin. The "greening" can contain solanine, an alkaloid that gives a bitter taste and is mildly toxic. You can peel off the green, but we prefer to throw those potatoes out.



The key to this salad's success is texture. Lots of crunch from green beans, celery, and radishes contrasts with smooth, creamy new potatoes.

RECIPES

New Potato Salad with Spring Vegetables & Shrimp

If your potatoes are older or have thick skins, peel them. *Serves six.*

- 1 lb. medium or large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2½ lb. new potatoes or small low-starch potatoes, cut into 1-inch wedges
- 1 recipe Lemon-Chive Vinaigrette (at right)

- ½ cup ½-inch pieces of fresh green beans
- ½ cup fresh peas
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup sliced radishes
- 4 scallions, trimmed and sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 bunch watercress, washed and stemmed (optional)
- Lemon zest and chopped chives for decoration

Bring a large pan of salted water to a boil, add the shrimp, reduce the heat, and simmer for 2 to 3 min., just until the shrimp are opaque throughout; don't overcook or the shrimp will be tough. Drain, dry on paper towels, and chill until you're ready to assemble the salad (you can do this up to 1 day ahead).

Put the potatoes in a large saucepan, cover with well-salted water, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and gently boil until tender, 8 to 15 min. depending on size and variety of potato. Test by cutting and tasting a chunk to be sure it's fully cooked.

Drain the potatoes, and while they're still hot, add about three-quarters of the vinaigrette; toss to coat well. Let the potatoes stand for about 30 min. so the dressing is absorbed.

In a small saucepan, bring a few cups of salted water to a boil. Add the beans and boil for 1 min. Add the peas; continue boiling for another 2 min., just until both vegetables are crisp-tender. Drain and immediately rinse in cold water to stop the cooking; drain very well.

When you're ready to serve the salad, toss the potatoes with the peas, beans, celery, radishes, and scallions, and the remaining vinaigrette. Season well with salt and pepper. Arrange on plates with a bit of watercress, if you like, and the lemon zest and chives.

Lemon-Chive Vinaigrette

Makes about 1 cup.

- 1 tsp. grated lemon zest
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh chives
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. sugar
- Salt and white pepper to taste
- ¾ cup vegetable oil

Put all the ingredients except the oil in a food processor, a blender, or a small bowl. Process (or whisk) until mixed. With the machine running or while whisking, slowly pour in the oil. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Mushroom & Asparagus Shepherd's Pie

To make the deep flavors of this dish even more complex and delicious, add some dried porcini: soak about ⅓ cup dried porcini in hot water to cover; when soft, chop the porcini and add them to the fresh mushrooms after they're cooked. Use about ½ cup of the soaking liquid in place of ½ cup of the stock (be careful not to include any grit that has accumulated on the bottom of the bowl). *Serves four to six.*

- ½ lb. fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 oz. bacon (2 large slices) (optional)
- 4 Tbs. butter

2 lb. mixed fresh mushrooms (button, cremini, chanterelle, shiitake, oyster), cleaned, stemmed, and cut into ½-inch chunks

¼ cup minced shallot

⅓ cup thinly sliced scallion

2 cloves garlic, minced

⅔ cup dry sherry

1½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable stock

3 Tbs. tomato paste

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme (or ½ tsp. dried)

4 tsp. softened butter mixed with 4 tsp. flour to form a smooth paste

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 recipe Lucia's Best Mashed Potatoes (below)

Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil, add the asparagus, and blanch until bright green and crisp-tender, 2 to 3 min. Drain and set aside.

In a very large skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp. Remove (leave the fat in the pan), drain on a paper towel, and set aside with the asparagus.

Add 1 Tbs. of the butter to the skillet, heat until foaming and add about half of the mushrooms. Cook over medium-high heat until browned and the mushrooms have released their juices, 10 to 15 min. Increase the heat to high and cook until the mushrooms are dry and nicely browned. Transfer them to a bowl and reserve. Add another 2 Tbs. butter and cook the second half of the mushrooms in the same way. Transfer them from the pan to the other mushrooms.

Reduce the heat to medium high. Add the last 1 Tbs. butter and sauté the shallot, scallions, and garlic for about 2 min. until softened and lightly browned. Add the sherry and deglaze the pan by scraping up any browned juices. Boil until the liquid is reduced to a syrupy glaze. Add the stock, tomato paste, and thyme. Simmer for a few minutes, and then whisk in the butter paste bit by bit. Simmer another minute until the sauce thickens a bit. Add the cooked asparagus, bacon, and mushrooms to the sauce, taste, and season with salt and pepper. Pour into a 2-qt. baking dish.

Heat the oven to 375°F. Drop spoonfuls of the mashed potatoes on the mushroom filling and spread gently to form an even (but not too smooth) layer. Bake in the hot oven until the potatoes are light brown and the filling is bubbling, 25 to 35 min.

Lucia's Best Mashed Potatoes

Serves four.

2½ lb. medium-starch potatoes (like Yukon Gold or Yellow Finn), peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks

2 tsp. salt; more to taste

⅔ cup light cream

6 Tbs. unsalted butter

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Put the potatoes in a large pot, cover with water, and add the salt. Bring the water to a boil and cook until the potatoes are very soft and starting to fall apart, 20 to 30 min. Drain the potatoes well, return them to the pot, and mash with a potato masher, a fork, or a sturdy whisk (or use a food mill), adding the cream and butter a little at a time as you mash. Make the potatoes as lumpy or as smooth as you like, but

don't keep mashing once they're smooth or they may become gluey. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Braised Potatoes, Eggplant & Red Peppers with Garlic & Cilantro

We like to use new potatoes when possible, especially red-skinned varieties. For a fresh-tasting vegetarian meal, serve this over steamed couscous, topped with a dab of yogurt, chopped fresh cilantro, and a wedge of lemon. *Serves six to eight.*

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1½ lb. low-starch potatoes, scrubbed and cut into ¾-inch dice (about 3 cups)

1 medium eggplant, peeled and cut into ¾-inch dice

3 large red bell peppers, cut into ¾-inch pieces

1 poblano or other mild fresh green chile, cut into ¾-inch pieces

2 medium tomatoes, cored and cut into ¾-inch dice, seeds and juice reserved

1 medium onion, cut into ¾-inch dice

Coarse salt

6 cloves garlic

1 Tbs. sweet paprika

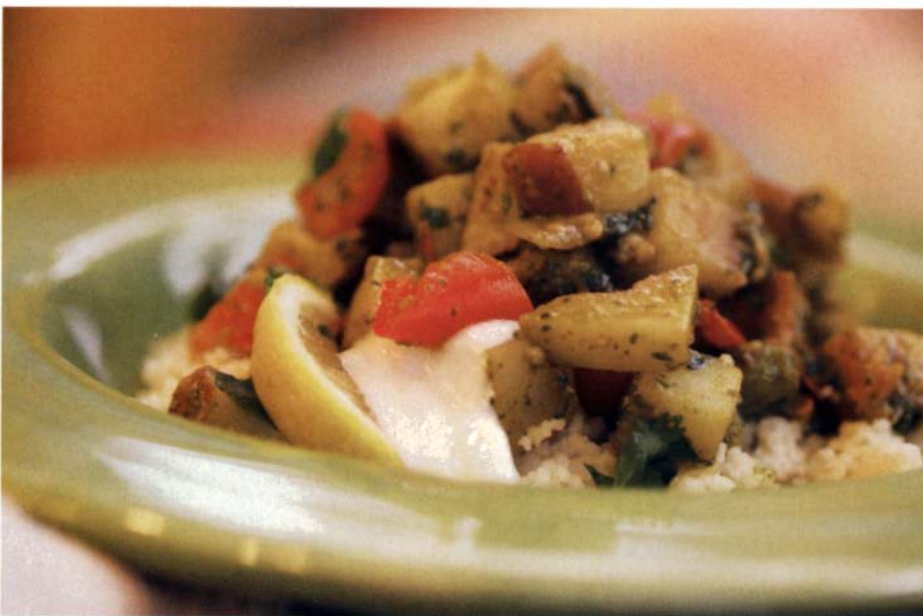
1 tsp. ground cumin

Cayenne to taste

2 cups lightly packed chopped fresh parsley

1½ cups lightly packed chopped fresh cilantro

⅓ cup fresh lemon juice



Heat a very large skillet or a Dutch oven over medium-high heat and coat it with about 3 Tbs. of the olive oil; reserve the rest for the sauce. Add the potatoes and sauté until they start to brown a bit around the edges, about 10 min. Raise the heat to high and add the eggplant, peppers, chile, tomatoes, and onion. Season with a little salt. Continue to sauté a few more minutes. Add about ¼ cup water, cover the pan, and turn down the heat to a vigorous simmer. Braise until all the vegetables are tender when poked with a knife, especially the potatoes and eggplant, 15 to 25 min. During braising, be sure to stir and



Try a taste test with a few different potato varieties. You'll likely find some more nutty, others more vegetal, and some are downright sweet. (See Sources, p. 76).

Plain potatoes shed their stodgy image when braised with peppers and eggplant and sauced with garlic, parsley, cilantro, and fresh lemon juice.

When are potatoes in season?

Potatoes are on the market shelves year-round, but they definitely have a season in which the flavors are at their peak. According to David Washburn of Red Cardinal Farm, an organic grower in Minnesota, new potatoes are harvested as early as April or May; mature potatoes through the middle of October. After that, the plant tops are cut and the potatoes left in the ground until it's time to ship them; they've stopped growing but continue to age, albeit not as rapidly as they would in a warehouse or on the shelf. This explains why the heirloom potatoes we used for recipe testing in November, though tasty, bore no comparison to the same varieties savored last summer.



Truly fresh potatoes taste more complex and vibrant than storage potatoes.

scoop the vegetables so they don't stick to the pan.

Meanwhile, make the sauce—Using a mortar and pestle or a food processor, smash or purée the garlic with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt, the paprika, cumin, and cayenne to make a smooth paste. Add the parsley and cilantro and pound or process just until they're crushed—don't completely purée them. Add the lemon juice and the remaining olive oil.

If any liquid remains in the pan when the vegetables are cooked, remove the cover, turn up the heat, and boil it off. Then turn off the heat, add the sauce to the skillet, and stir to coat all the vegetables. Taste for seasoning and add more salt, lemon, or cayenne to taste. Serve hot.

Potato & Leek Gratin

The ham in this gratin is optional. If you do use it, however, taste it first. If it's very salty, use a bit less ham and be careful with the added salt. *Serves four.*

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable stock
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Freshly grated nutmeg to taste
- 1 large leek (white and light green parts only), sliced very thinly, washed well, and drained (about 2 cups)
- 4 oz. thinly sliced baked or cured ham, chopped (about 1 cup)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Gruyère cheese

In a small saucepan, combine the stock, cream, garlic, and bay leaf; bring just to a boil. Take it from the heat and let the flavors infuse as you assemble the gratin.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Spread about one-third of the potatoes in the bottom of a 2-qt. gratin or heavy baking dish. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Next, spread about half of the leeks and half of the ham on the potatoes. Top with another one-third of the potatoes, season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg again, and top with the rest of the leeks and ham. Arrange the remaining potatoes on top, and season.

Put the gratin dish on a baking sheet (to catch any spills). Pour the cream mixture over the potatoes, discarding the garlic. Tuck the bay leaf in the center of the gratin for decoration (but don't let anyone eat it), or discard it, too. Sprinkle with the cheese.

Cover the dish loosely with foil and bake in the hot oven until the potatoes start to get tender, about 30 min. Remove the foil and continue baking, basting occasionally with the liquid in the dish, until the potatoes and leeks are very tender when pierced with a knife and a golden crust forms on top, another 30 to 45 min. Let cool for about 15 min. before serving.

Beth Dooley is a food writer in Minneapolis. Lucia Watson is the chef-owner of Lucia's restaurant, also in Minneapolis. The two wrote Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland (Knopf). ♦

This potato and leek gratin makes a satisfying one-dish meal (well, two really). Just fix a salad, pour a glass of wine, and enjoy.



Sweet and Savory Glazed Chicken

Baking keeps the chicken moist;
a flash under the broiler turns
a saucy coating into an intense glaze

BY MIMA LECOCQ



Moist chicken with delicious burnished skin needs a two-step process. An initial blast of heat starts the cooking; finishing under the broiler sets the glaze.

One night last spring, I got the urge for roast duck à l'orange—its moist meat, glazed skin, and appealing sweet-savory flavors were what I craved. But since this whim of mine was a last-minute notion, I had to make do with what I had on hand.

I couldn't exactly get free-range duck at 7:00 on a Sunday night, so I decided to try a quick glazing method on chicken, with ingredients from my pantry and a two-step bake-and-broil technique. The chicken was delicious—very moist inside with a

flavorful surface. Parts of the skin got crispy and other parts got sort of glazy-sticky—a bit like barbecued chicken. That successful dinner has inspired quite a few other glazes, including orange-balsamic, ginger-soy, and mustard-molasses. Sweet-glazed chicken is now a weeknight dinner favorite at my house—and it's a top seller at my take-out shop, too.

Use a two-step process—bake, then broil

Start the process by mixing a thick, sweet-savory glaze in a small, shallow bowl and then dredging

Dredge, season, bake, and broil for delicious, moist chicken



Mix a simple glaze in a small, shallow bowl. Dredge the chicken pieces through the glaze.



Arrange the pieces, skin side down, on a baking sheet. If there's any leftover glaze, pour it on.

the chicken pieces through the mixture so they're evenly coated.

Arrange the chicken pieces skin side down in a shallow rimmed pan. This way, the glaze won't run off, and the skin will have good contact with the pan during cooking so more fat gets rendered. A sheet

You can make three delicious glazes
from ingredients
you probably have on hand.

pan works best because it exposes the chicken to a maximum amount of oven heat during baking. In a deeper pan, the chicken would swim in juices and glaze runoff, and the skin would stay rubbery.

The first stage of cooking—baking at 400°F—cooks the chicken thoroughly but keeps it moist inside. Next, turn the pieces over and broil them, rotating the pan or the chicken pieces every few minutes to encourage even browning and prevent burning. This brief broiling gives a crisped, caramelized finish and intensifies the flavor of the glaze.

As a final note, these sweet glazes do get sticky, but don't bother lining the pan with foil. I tried it and found that the foil adheres to the glazed chicken. Personally, I'd rather soak a sticky pan overnight than have to peel bits of foil off my chicken.

RECIPES

Glazed Ginger-Soy Chicken

I love serving this chicken with white rice tossed with toasted sesame seeds and stir-fried asparagus tips, snow peas, and a julienne of carrots. *Serves four.*

¼ cup hoisin sauce
1 Tbs. rice vinegar
2 Tbs. soy sauce
1 tsp. minced garlic
2 tsp. minced fresh ginger
3- to 4-lb. roasting chicken, cut into pieces
(or 3½ lb. chicken pieces), rinsed and dried
Freshly ground black pepper

Set a rack at the highest oven position. Heat the oven to 400°F. In a small, shallow bowl, whisk the hoisin sauce, vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, and ginger. Dredge each chicken piece in the glaze, coating completely. Put the pieces, skin side down, in a rimmed, shallow 10x15-inch sheet pan. Pour any leftover glaze over the chicken; sprinkle liberally with pepper. Roast on the top rack until the juices run barely clear when you prick the chicken, about 40 min. Remove the pan from the oven and set the broiler on high. Turn the chicken over and baste it with the pan drippings. If a lot of fat has rendered out, spoon some off before broiling to prevent flare-ups. Broil, basting the chicken and rotating the pan for even browning, until the chicken is shiny and well browned, about 8 min. Drizzle the chicken with the pan drippings before serving.

Glazed Mustard-Molasses Chicken

This version is delicious with potato salad tossed with bacon, capers, and a warm vinaigrette. *Serves four.*



Season liberally with pepper and salt and bake in a hot oven—400°F—for 40 minutes.

¼ cup molasses
3 Tbs. Dijon-style mustard
1 Tbs. apple-cider vinegar
¼ tsp. Tabasco or other hot sauce
3- to 4-lb. roasting chicken, cut into pieces
(or 3½ lb. chicken pieces), rinsed and dried
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Set a rack at the highest oven position. Heat the oven to 400°F. In a small, shallow bowl, whisk together the molasses, mustard, vinegar, and Tabasco sauce. Dredge the chicken pieces in the glaze, coating completely. Put the pieces, skin side down, in a rimmed, shallow 10x15-inch sheet pan. Pour any leftover glaze over the chicken; sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Roast on the top rack until the juices run barely clear when you prick the chicken, about 40 min. Remove the pan from the oven and set the broiler on high. Turn the chicken over and baste it with the pan drippings. If a lot of fat has rendered out, spoon some off before broiling to prevent flare-ups. Broil, basting the chicken and rotating the pan for even browning, until the chicken pieces are shiny and well browned, about 8 min. Drizzle the chicken with the pan drippings before serving.

Glazed Balsamic-Orange Chicken

Orzo tossed with olive oil, garlic, greens, toasted pine nuts, and a splash of balsamic vinegar works well with this dish. Malika Henderson, sous-chef at Carried Away, helped develop the glaze.
Serves four.

¾ cup fresh orange juice
3 Tbs. dark brown sugar

2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
2 tsp. dry mustard
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
3- to 4-lb. roasting chicken, cut into pieces
(or 3½ lb. chicken pieces), rinsed and dried
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Set a rack at the highest oven position. Heat the oven to 400°F. In a small saucepan, combine the orange juice and brown sugar. Boil until reduced by half. Stir in the balsamic vinegar, dry mustard, and thyme. Pour into a small, shallow bowl; mix until smooth. Dredge each chicken piece in the glaze, coating completely. Put the pieces, skin side down, in a rimmed, shallow 10x15-inch sheet pan. Pour any leftover glaze over the chicken; sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Roast on the top rack until the juices run barely clear when you prick the chicken, about 40 min. Remove the pan from the oven and set the broiler on high. Turn the chicken over and baste it with the pan drippings. If a lot of fat has rendered out, spoon some off before broiling to prevent flare-ups. Broil, basting the chicken and rotating the pan for even browning, until the chicken pieces are shiny and well browned, about 8 min. Drizzle the chicken with the pan drippings before serving.

Mima Lecocq and her husband, Tom McNary, own Carried Away, a catering and take-out shop in Aptos, California. ♦



Flashing the chicken under the broiler crisps the skin and gives it a browned, glossy finish. For even browning, rotate the chicken.

Using Pastas in Soup

Use the right size, add it near the end of cooking, and you'll have perfectly cooked pasta that gives delicious body to soup



For Minestra di Pasta e Piselli, use a tiny pasta and cut the other ingredients to about the same size.

BY CLIFFORD A. WRIGHT

My first encounter with pasta in soup was alphabets from a can. Even at age seven, I found them mushy and tasteless, appealing only because I could spell my name. But a few decades later, several trips to Italy and some experiments in the kitchen changed my mind about pasta in soup and showed me how delightful it can be if a few simple rules are followed.

By choosing pasta that's the right size for the thickness of the finished soup, by cutting ingredients about the same size as the pasta, and by adding the pasta when the soup is just about done, pasta will stay firm and delicious in soup, adding heft and texture to the finished dish.

The lighter the soup, the smaller the pasta

Although there are no strict rules, a good guideline is that the clearer the soup broth and the fewer the ingredients in the soup, the smaller the pasta shape should be. The exception here is stuffed pasta, which is best shown off in simple broths. Because the pasta actually cooks in the broth, it's a good idea to start with extra broth. Alternatively, if you're anxious about losing precious broth, cook the pasta separately and add it right before serving.

♦ **Tiny pastas, such as stelline, acini di pepe, orzo, and tubettini,** are best for brothy soups where the ingredients are diced small, as in the Minestra di Pasta e Piselli on p. 36. These tiny pastas continue to soak up liquid as the pot sits on the stove, so it's important to serve the soup as soon as the pasta is cooked. If you don't want to serve it immediately, turn off the heat and add the pasta later.

One more thing about tiny soup pastas: they expand considerably in broth, so you'll be using a little less pasta than you think you'll need. Because soup pasta is small, packs densely, and loves to hog all the

broth, it makes sense to follow the cup measurements in the recipes starting on p. 36 rather than eyeballing the quantity and using, say, a quarter of a box.

♦ **Slightly bigger pasta, such as ditalini, macaroni, and tubetti,** are good for heartier soups, such as the Pasta e Fagioli on p. 36. Bigger pasta soaks up broth readily, too, but not quite as quickly as tiny soup pasta does.

♦ **Stuffed pastas, such as ravioli or tortellini,** are more delicate and apt to break apart, so they're best in brothy soups that aren't chock full of competing ingredients that might poke or tear them.

Dice the ingredients to about the same size as the pasta you're using. Again, this isn't a hard and fast rule, but I think that each spoonful of soup is most pleasing when all the constituents are about the same size.

Adding the pasta last means it won't get mushy

For the best-tasting soup, it's crucial that the pasta stay firm and doesn't get mushy. But pasta naturally soaks up water, and it will continue to soak up what-

ever broth it's sitting in, even after the soup is done. There are a few ways to minimize this.

Before you add the pasta, make sure the soup is almost done. Everything else in the soup should finish cooking in about the same short time that the pasta needs to cook. The best way to check is by tasting. If there are beans in the broth, be sure that they're almost completely tender before adding the pasta. Then, once the pasta is cooked, take the soup off the heat and serve it right away.

When freezing the soup to eat another time, cook the pasta only halfway. Or, omit the pasta until you're ready to reheat the soup, which you should do gently to cook the pasta. These recipes are already quite flavorful, so if you need to thin the soup, just add a little water until it's the consistency you like.

I like to make my own broth for most soups (including these, where the broth gets full play), preparing a double batch of the chicken-beef broth on p. 37 and freezing some for future use. If you don't have any homemade broth around, you'll get good results with College Inn low-sodium canned broth.

(Recipes follow)

Points to remember to make pasta taste its best in soup



Cut ingredients to about the same size as the pasta for a pleasing spoonful of soup.



Time the addition of the pasta so it will be cooked to *al dente* just as the other ingredients have finished cooking.



Cook delicate filled pasta like tortellini separately and then add it to the finished soup.



Parmesan adds even more to this hearty soup's layered flavors. Tubetti are small enough to eat with a spoon, but large enough so you can find them.

RECIPES

Minestra di Pasta e Fagioli

This hearty and delicious soup is so full-bodied that you only need a green salad to accompany it. The prosciutto skin is used for flavoring, and you can find it easily at the deli counter of an Italian market or supermarket (often they'll give it to you for free). If you want to eat the prosciutto skin, cut it into strips; otherwise, leave it in one or two pieces so that you can discard it easily after the soup is cooked. Saltiness of prosciutto skin and parmigiano rinds will vary, so be sure to taste as you go. Canned chickpeas are fine. *Serves six to eight.*

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling
1 lb. pork stew meat, cut in ½-inch dice
¼ lb. pancetta, cut into strips
¼ lb. prosciutto skin or skin from salt pork, whole or cut into strips (optional)
1 large onion, chopped
6 cloves garlic, chopped
1 fennel bulb (about ¾ lb.), trimmed and diced
1 rib celery, diced
8 to 10 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
1½ cups dried white beans (about 10 oz.)
1 cup cooked or canned chickpeas (about ½ lb.)
1 cinnamon stick
1 bay leaf
1 sprig fresh rosemary
¼ lb. parmigiano-reggiano cheese rinds (optional)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ lb. tubetti, ditali, or other short macaroni
Freshly grated parmigiano-reggiano cheese for sprinkling

In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat and cook the pork, pancetta, and prosciutto skin until they turn color, about 5 min. Add the onion, garlic, fennel, and celery and cook until softened, 12 to 15 min., stirring occasionally. Add the chicken

stock, white beans, chickpeas, cinnamon stick, bay leaf, rosemary, and parmigiano rinds. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil (about 10 min.) and then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook until the white beans are soft, about 1½ hours. Add the pasta and cook until *al dente*, 12 to 15 min., stirring. Discard the cinnamon stick, bay leaf, and rosemary sprig. Both the prosciutto skin and parmigiano rinds can be eaten if you like. Serve immediately with a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of parmigiano-reggiano.

Minestra di Pasta e Piselli

The prosciutto and lard add lots of flavor to this soup, but if you can't get any, use butter and olive oil instead. *Yields four generous servings.*

1½ oz. slice of prosciutto (about ¼ inch thick), roughly chopped
¼ cup lard (or 2 Tbs. butter and 2 Tbs. olive oil)
1 medium onion, roughly chopped
1 large clove garlic, roughly chopped
12 large fresh basil leaves
8 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
½ cup stelline, orzo, acini di pepe, or other tiny soup pasta
½ cup peas
½ cup finely diced carrot
½ cup finely diced fennel
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Lemon wedges
Freshly ground parmigiano-reggiano cheese

In a food processor, blend the prosciutto, lard, onion, garlic, and basil until all the pieces are minuscule, scraping down the sides occasionally. Alternatively, chop everything very finely with a knife. Put this mixture (called a *battuto*) in a large saucepan and cook over medium heat until the onions are soft and everything looks mushy, 8 to 10 min., stirring frequently. Add the chicken stock. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and add the pasta. Simmer 5 min. Add the peas, carrots, and fennel, simmering until both the pasta and the vegetables are just tender, about another 5 min. Season with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls, add a squeeze of lemon, sprinkle with parmigiano-reggiano, and serve immediately.

Tortellini in Brodo with Lamb & Asparagus

If you want this soup to be heartier, add about 6 ounces white beans, soaked and then simmered until tender, about 90 minutes. *Serves six.*

½ lb. asparagus (about 12 medium stalks), tough ends trimmed and sliced diagonally about 1½ inches long
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling
1 lb. lamb sirloin chops (or leg of lamb), cut in ½-inch dice
1 medium onion, finely chopped
4 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves
3 Tbs. dry white wine
8 cups Beef & Chicken Broth (see recipe opposite)
1 lb. small cheese tortellini or small ravioli
Freshly grated pecorino cheese



Stuffed pasta needs a little room. It tastes best in a soup that's not too hefty with competing ingredients, as in this Tortellini in Brodo.

Cook the asparagus in boiling salted water until tender, 5 to 7 min. Drain and set aside. In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil over high heat and brown the lamb on all sides, working in batches. Remove the lamb with a slotted spoon, turn the heat to medium high, and cook the onion, garlic, and rosemary until the onion is soft, about 4 min., stirring. Return the lamb to the pot, add the wine, and cook until the liquid is reduced by half, 2 to 3 min. Pour in the broth; simmer gently until reduced by one-third. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of abundantly salted water to a vigorous boil and add the tortellini. Cook until *al dente*, following the package directions, and drain well. Add the pasta and asparagus to the broth; heat for a few minutes. Taste

and add salt and pepper if needed. Serve immediately with pecorino cheese and a drizzle of olive oil, if you like.

Beef & Chicken Broth

While you're at it, make a double batch of this broth—it keeps in the freezer for up to six months. *Yields 3 quarts.*

3 lb. cracked beef marrow, shin, or shank bones (or a combination), with meat on them

3 lb. chicken wings or necks

1 large onion, cut into eighths

8 plum tomatoes, cut in half

1 carrot, cut in chunks

2 ribs celery, cut in chunks

10 black peppercorns

Bouquet garni of 3 sprigs fresh parsley, 1 sprig fresh thyme, 2 fresh sage leaves, 1 bay leaf, tied in cheesecloth

4 qt. water

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Put the beef bones, chicken wings, onion, tomatoes, carrot, celery, peppercorns, *bouquet garni*, and water in a stockpot, bring to a boil, and then reduce to a simmer. Skim all foam from the surface. Partially cover the pot and simmer on very low heat for at least 6 hours, skimming as needed. Pour the broth through a strainer. Discard the bones, meat, vegetables, and *bouquet garni*. Rinse the strainer, line it with cheesecloth, and pour the broth through again. Season to taste with salt and pepper. To degrease, let the broth rest in the refrigerator until the fat congeals on the top and can be lifted off.

Clifford Wright is the author of Italian Pure & Simple (William Morrow). His next book, A Mediterranean Feast, is due out in October. ♦

Soup pastas

There's a whole world of tiny pastas—more grown up than alphabets—that are best enjoyed in soup. Their Italian names are beguiling.



acini di pepe
"peppercorns"



ditalini
"little thimbles"



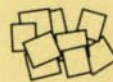
farfalline
"little butterflies"



lumachine
"little snails"



orzo
"barley seeds"



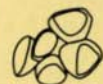
quadrucci
"tiny squares"



stelline
"little stars"



tubettini
"little tubes"



conchigliette
"little sea shells"



funghetti
"little mushrooms"



anellini
"little rings"

wine choices



Soups with chunkier textures partner best with wine

Wine with soup? Look out: many chefs and wine experts give the combo a big thumbs-down. But it's mainly just a potential texture problem: liquid against liquid is boring (try it: both the broth and the wine vanish down your throat). There's no problem with flavors, though: as long as the soup is based on wine-friendly ingredients (no vinegary tang, hot spice, fruit,

nor anything sweet), wine and soup can taste great together.

The chunkier the soup, the more wine-friendly it becomes. These satisfying recipes, with plenty of meat, veggies, and pasta, make truly splendid partners for wine. Explore some medium-weight Italian reds and their domestic Cal-Ital counterparts—they're the

wines these dishes grew up with.

No need to max out on your credit card: You'll find plenty of great values at \$12 or less. Look for Michele Chiarlo's Barbera d'Asti from Piemonte; Ruffino Aziano, Gabbiano Chianti Classico, Banfi Cantine, or Antinori Santa Cristina, all from Tuscany. Try Vestini Marche Sangiovese or Zonin

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. From California, try a fruity-spicy Barbera from Montevina or Louis M. Martini, or spend a bit more for an Atlas Peak Sangiovese (partly owned by the Italian wine-maker Antinori) from Napa.

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about wine and food pairing in the San Francisco Bay area.



A Fresh Approach to Carrots

BY SEEN LIPPERT

Carrots can come in all kinds of colors.
Try different varieties as you find them at farmers' markets and specialty stores.

Take another look at this familiar vegetable as it displays its sweet flavor and vibrant color in five fresh recipes

When we were kids, we ate a lot of carrots, always raw and sprinkled with salt. I think that's the way many people approach carrots—as a virtuous snack between meals. And all those carrots chopped up for the stockpot don't get much thought either, even though carrots add a sweet depth of flavor and a splash of color to stews and soups. So it's

probably not surprising that carrots are often overlooked by home cooks and restaurant chefs alike. But because carrots—so wonderful as a flavor base—can also hold their own, I often make them the star of a soup, salad, savory soufflé, or side dish.

Buy the freshest carrots you can and use them sooner rather than later

At first glance, carrots can seem uninspiring. Sold year-round, they don't generate the same excitement as, say, asparagus in springtime or tomatoes and corn in summer. And because they last a while in the refrigerator without any apparent wilting or spoiling, people tend to buy them and forget about them. This prompts a vicious circle: when they finally do get used, these older carrots have lost a lot of flavor and are, well, uninspiring.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Good fresh carrots, on the other hand, are worth getting excited about. When used raw, they make a crisp and refreshing salad. When cooked, their sweetness intensifies and the vegetable practically melts in your mouth.

Look for firm carrots with smooth skin. Carrots may be available year-round, but they have different characteristics depending on when they're harvested. In late spring, you can find young, tiny carrots that are so mild and tender you don't even need to peel them. With these carrots, I leave a little of the tender green stem attached, which is perfectly edible and which adds a bright dash of springtime color. In the summer, you'll find more mature carrots, which have a stronger flavor. In late fall and early winter, carrots are at their sweetest, as cold weather turns their starches to sugars.

Ideally you should taste before you buy because it's hard to judge a carrot's flavor by looks alone. When you can't taste, you can look for clues that point to freshness. An older carrot will look dry and have cracks running through it. And if you can bend the carrot and it doesn't snap, don't buy it.

Green tops are a good sign—most of the time. Carrots with their greenery still attached are usually fresher than those carrots packed in plastic without their tops. But be sure the greens are moist and verdant. Left on too long, the greens can rob carrots of their moisture and vitamins, which is why you should cut off the greens before storing carrots.

Use your carrots! Store carrots in the coldest part of your refrigerator. Use true baby carrots (as opposed to those larger carrots whittled to thumb size and sold in plastic bags) within three days of buying them for the fullest flavor. More mature carrots should last a week or so. As for those that have been hanging around for weeks, they might suffice in dishes where the carrot plays a minor role, but please don't try them in these recipes. And don't even bother with the carrots that got lost in the shuffle and now bend like rubber; give them to the nearest rabbit or horse instead.

Not all carrots are orange—try white or even purple

The most common variety found in American markets is Imperator, which is orange, long, and tapered. Small, round varieties, such as Thumbelina, Danvers, and Paris Market Round, are becoming easier to find, especially at farmers' markets. Nantes, a French variety that's uniformly cylindrical, is becoming more widely available here and has an amazing sweetness. It also has the benefit of a relatively uniform size, so it's easier to cut and chop into evenly sized pieces. (See Sources, p. 76, for mail-order information.)

I've also cooked with carrots that range from pale white to reddish purple. When I worked at Chez



"It's best to peel carrots as you need them," says Seen Lippert. If you must peel them ahead of time, wrap them in a damp towel and refrigerate them.

Panisse, we'd buy carrots like these from the Chino family ranch in Rancho Santa Fe, California. They don't do mail-order, but if you live near there, their farmstand is definitely worth a visit.

How to cut carrots without cutting yourself

I remember pieces of carrot flying around the kitchen, our poodles lunging for them, whenever we kids tried our hand at chopping carrots for mom's spaghetti sauce. Because of their round shape, cut-

Roasted carrots are as appealing as they are easy. Simply toss the carrots with a little oil, salt, and your favorite herb and cook in a hot oven until tender.



The sweetness of classic glazed carrots is nicely tempered by cooking shallots along with them.



ting carrots can be a pain—literally. As you slice, the carrot can roll away. The trick to making carrots easy to work with is to give them a stable base. To do so, cut a thin slice off the length of the carrot. Then lay the cut side down on the work surface. Now you're ready to cut whatever shape you desire. (See the photos below for another cutting suggestion.)

Always use a very sharp knife when cutting carrots. While that's a good rule for any vegetable, carrots especially need a sharp blade; the force you need to exert to cut them with a dull blade can backfire on you, and you'll end up cutting your hand in-

stead. And don't shy away from mechanical tools. Although learning to slice carrots into a julienne by hand is a worthy lesson, don't hesitate to use a mandoline or a Japanese slicer when you have a lot of carrots to cut. And a food processor is a miracle worker when you have to shred pounds of carrots.

To peel or not to peel? I don't peel carrots if they're young and tender; the skin packs a lot of flavor as well as vitamins. As carrots mature, their skin becomes a little bitter, so I peel off just a thin layer (I like Oxo's Good Grips peeler, but the kind you find in hardware stores is just fine, too). Mature carrots can have a core that tastes woody and fibrous; I remove it by cutting the carrots lengthwise and then cutting along the sides of the core where it meets the outer orange part of the carrot.

Carrots take to all kinds of cooking

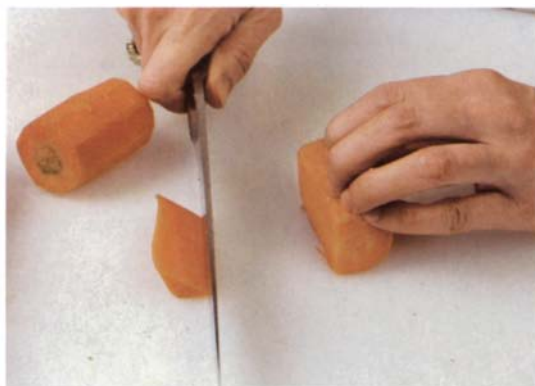
Carrots can be cooked any number of ways. I love them roasted with a little salt and olive oil, or sautéed with a bit of garlic and some tomato paste. Just avoid cooking carrots in a large amount of water, which robs them of their flavor as well as their vitamins. Make sure any liquid is either evaporated over high heat to intensify the flavor of the carrots or used in the finished dish.

Fresh herbs of every sort complement carrots. My favorites are chervil and chives added just before serving. Dried spices, such as coriander and cumin, pair nicely with carrots, too. But whatever you add to them, the best way to ensure good taste is to start with fresh, flavorful carrots.



Who needs lettuce for a salad? Julienned carrots make a crisp, refreshing salad when tossed with a Moroccan-inspired vinaigrette.

How to julienne a carrot



Give the carrot a flat base for easiest cutting. Cut a thin slice lengthwise down the carrot and then lay the carrot flat on that side for a more stable footing.



Square off the sides for a julienne. Cut the carrot into 1/8-inch-thick slabs and then stack the slabs and cut them into strips.



RECIPES

Glazed Carrots & Shallots

The cooking time will vary depending on the kind and size of the carrots and on how soft you like them. I prefer mine with a little bite left to them. Serves four.

1½ lb. carrots, peeled
6 shallots
4 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into pieces
⅓ cup water
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 to 3 Tbs. sugar

If using small or baby carrots, leave them whole; if using large carrots, cut them in half lengthwise. Set them flat side down and cut slices on the diagonal



about ¼ inch thick. Peel the shallots; cut larger ones into quarters lengthwise and smaller ones in half. Put the vegetables in a pan large enough to hold them in a thin layer. Add the butter, water, salt, and sugar. Bring the liquid to a boil; reduce the heat to medium, cover the pot, and cook for 20 min., stirring occasionally and checking to be sure the vegetables aren't too dry. Add a few drops of water if needed. Remove the lid, increase the heat to high, and cook, stirring frequently and scraping the bottom of the pot, until the carrots are caramelized and glazed, about another 10 min.

Mediterranean Carrot Salad

I like the look and texture of this salad best when the carrots are cut into a thin julienne, which is fast work if you have a mandoline or a Japanese slicer. You can also coarsely shred the carrots in a food processor or on a box grater and still get a tasty salad; it just won't hold up as well once it's dressed. *Serves four.*

2 lb. carrots, peeled
¼ tsp. fennel seeds
¼ tsp. mustard seeds
¼ tsp. coriander seeds
⅛ tsp. cardamom seeds (from 1 or 2 pods)
2 cloves garlic
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1 Tbs. sherry vinegar
⅛ tsp. cayenne
½ to ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ cup minced fresh chives

Cut the carrots into a thin julienne, about ⅛ inch thick and about 2 inches long (or shred them with a coarse grater). Grind the fennel, mustard, coriander, and cardamom seeds in a spice grinder or coffee grinder. In a mortar and pestle, smash the garlic with the salt to a paste. (Alternatively, smash the garlic on the cutting board with the side of a broad knife. Sprinkle it with the salt and work it into a paste with a fork.) In a large bowl, combine the garlic paste, lemon juice, and vinegar. Whisk in the cayenne, the ground seeds, and the olive oil. Add the carrots

and toss to coat. Allow to marinate for at least 15 min. and up to an hour. Taste and adjust seasonings, if necessary. Divide the salad among four plates, sprinkle with pepper, and garnish with the minced chives.

Carrot & Coriander Soup

This recipe was inspired by a soup of Diana Kennedy's. If you can find cilantro with its roots attached, add the roots, well washed, to the soup for an even stronger cilantro flavor. *Serves eight.*

6 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 yellow onions, thinly sliced
3 lb. carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
1 bunch cilantro (about 3 oz.), stems attached, washed well, a handful of leaves reserved for garnish
1 jalapeño, stemmed, halved, and seeded
1 tsp. salt
1 Tbs. coriander seeds, ground
6 to 8 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth or water
½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream

In a large saucepan, melt 4 Tbs. of the butter over medium-high heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft, about 5 min. Add the carrots, cilantro (except for the reserved leaves), jalapeño, salt, and ground coriander. Continue to cook the vegetables for about 10 min., stirring occasionally. Add the stock

Carrots give their texture more than their flavor to this spicy Mexican soup.
 You can adjust the thickness by adding more or less liquid.

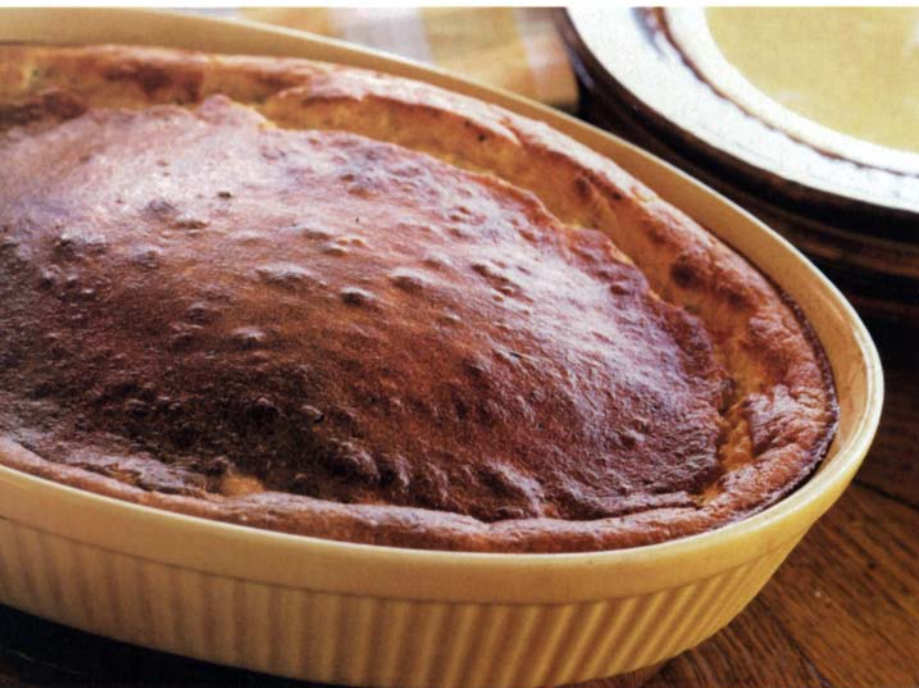




Fold gently to give your soufflé volume and height. Whipped egg whites lighten the color and texture of a cooked carrot purée.



Run your finger all around the rim. This step helps the soufflé form its classic cap.



A savory carrot soufflé depends on fresh carrots for the best flavor. Make one big soufflé or portion the batter into smaller ramekins for individual servings.

and simmer until the vegetables are completely tender, about 35 min. Carefully purée the soup in batches in a blender until smooth. (For less heat, remove one half of the jalapeño before puréeing.) Stir in the remaining 2 Tbs. butter and taste for seasoning. If the soup seems too thick, add a little water. Garnish with a drizzle of *crème fraîche* and the reserved cilantro leaves.

Carrot & Ginger Soufflé

Brightly flavored and light as air, this soufflé makes a great side dish alongside a roast chicken or beef

tenderloin. Or serve it with a salad for a light lunch. *Serves six.*

- 1 cup peeled diced carrots (from about 4 medium carrots)**
- ½ cup water**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- ¾ cup milk**
- 5 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the baking dish**
- 3 Tbs. all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbs. minced fresh chives**
- 1 tsp. minced fresh ginger**
- 3 to 4 tsp. fresh lemon juice**
- ½ tsp. honey**
- 4 large eggs, separated**

Heat the oven to 425°F. Butter a 1½-qt. low-sided gratin or round baking dish.

In a small saucepan, combine the carrots, water, and salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, cover, and cook until the carrots are tender, about 10 min. Uncover and increase the heat to high to evaporate the water completely. When no water remains, add the milk. Purée the carrots and milk in a blender until smooth.

In a clean pan, melt the butter. Add the flour, stirring until smooth. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, for 2 to 3 min. Add the puréed carrots, bring to a boil, and cook, stirring, until thick, 3 to 4 min. Pass the mixture through a mesh strainer into a 2-qt. bowl. Add the chives, ginger, lemon juice, and honey. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Whisk the egg yolks one at a time into the carrot mixture. In a large, clean bowl, whisk the egg whites to firm but not dry peaks. Fold half of the egg whites into the carrot mixture, mixing gently with a spatula. Fold in the other half until just combined. Don't over-mix or you'll deflate the egg whites.

Pour the soufflé mixture into the gratin dish. Run your thumb around the inside rim to help a cap form. Place the dish gently into the oven and bake until browned and puffy, about 15 min. It should be set everywhere but still somewhat creamy in the center. Serve immediately.

Roasted Carrots with Herbs

Carrots are also wonderful roasted with their cousin the parsnip, cut into pieces the same size as the carrot. *Serves four.*

- 2 lb. carrots, peeled and left whole if small or cut into 1-inch lengths**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh herbs, such as chives, flat-leaf parsley, thyme, or a mix**

Heat the oven to 450°F. In a large bowl, toss the carrots with the oil, salt, and herbs. Spread the carrots in a baking pan just large enough to hold them in one layer. Roast, shaking the pan once or twice, until the carrots are fork-tender, about half an hour.

Seen Lippert is the executive chef at Metrazur in Manhattan's newly refurbished Grand Central Terminal. ♦

A couple of years ago, my husband and I joined a crowd outside a Paris department store and watched a young man demonstrate an inexpensive plastic V-slicer. He sliced, diced, chopped, and julienned while French housewives oohed and aahed all around him. At the end of his virtuoso performance, I coveted that slicer but I didn't buy it, knowing that I had a \$150 stainless-steel French mandoline at home, which would work much better than his cheap slicer... wouldn't it? I've been wondering ever since whether the device was as good as he made it look.

I got my chance to find out when the *Fine Cooking* editors asked me to test a range of kitchen slicers: a modestly priced V-slicer like the one I saw in Paris, a plastic Japanese slicer, and a professional-quality mandoline. For fun, we also decided to look at a home deli slicer, a miniature version of the machines that delicatessens use to cut thin slices of turkey breast, ham, and cheese. And for comparison, I sliced a number of ingredients with the slicing blade on my food processor—a tool that many cooks already have.

But what about a sharp knife? Even cooks with expert knife skills sometimes turn to a slicer when they want truly consistent slices or julienne-cut vegetables—especially in large quantities (such as for a gratin recipe that calls for several pounds of potatoes sliced paper thin).

With the assistance of my husband, Doug, who is fascinated with kitchen gadgets, I spent several hours methodically slicing, dicing, cleaning, and critiquing these instruments. We wound up with three hand cuts between us (all from the same slicer) and some strong opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

The German-made **Boerner V-slicer**, which costs about \$40, is so called because the two cutting blades form a V. In theory, that's a smart feature. The two angled blades should have better slicing action than the single, straight-on blade of a mandoline, and in fact, it did slice tomatoes cleanly, a feat the straight-edged manual slicers could not manage. The V-slicer also did a neat job of slicing cucumbers, potatoes, and fennel.

With its two julienne insert blades, you can

Sizing Up Slicers

Can a dedicated food slicer do a better job than a good knife or a food processor? We tested four—from low-end to high-tech—to find out

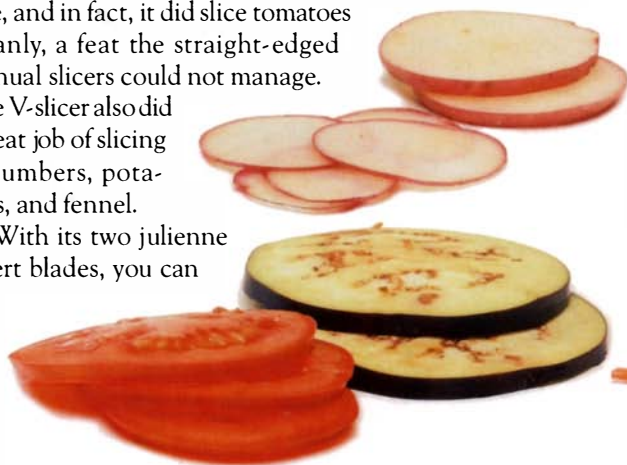
BY JANET FLETCHER



Boerner V-Slicer

Best results: Thinly sliced potatoes, cucumbers, summer squash, and onions; evenly sliced eggplant and tomatoes; chopped onions; thinly julienned carrots

Not worth trying: Cheese, meat

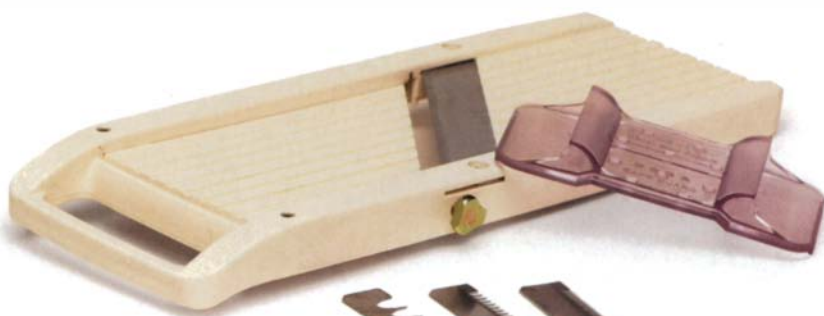




Matfer Mandoline

Best results: Very thinly sliced cucumbers and onions; paper-thin fennel and carrots; Parmesan shards; three sizes of julienne-cut carrots, zucchini, and potatoes; waffle-cut potatoes

Not worth trying: Eggplant, tomatoes, meat



Benriner

Best results: Tiny, tiny, string-like julienne of carrots, daikon, squash; very thin potatoes; cucumbers, zucchini, yellow squash in varying thicknesses

Not worth trying: Tomatoes, eggplant, hard squash, meat



slice potatoes in two sizes for french fries. It's easier if you halve the potato lengthwise first, but the larger julienne requires a lot of force to push the potato through. And the Boerner has a well-designed gripper, the safety device that you use to slide food across the blades. Because of the needlelike prongs on the gripper, the Boerner is the only slicer I tested that can chop well. To chop an onion, for example, you pierce it with the gripper through the root end, slice it in one direction by hand with a knife, turn it 90 degrees, and slice it across one of the julienne inserts. Anyone with good knife skills might find the procedure tedious, but it does produce a beautifully chopped onion.

The V-slicer has two chief drawbacks. First, the slicing inserts can't be adjusted, so you have a choice of only two thicknesses. Fortunately, the thin insert produces slices appropriate for potato gratins and cucumber salads. Unfortunately, the V-slicer doesn't slice thinly enough for shaved fennel salads or Parmesan shards. And, perhaps more important, the blades can't be removed and sharpened. But it's worth noting that handling the inserts isn't as scary as changing the blades on the other machines.

The French **Matfer mandoline** (about \$160) has a sleek fiberglass frame, a removable (and thus easy to sharpen) stainless-steel blade, three different julienne cutters in a sturdy case, and an adjustable plate for varying thicknesses. A handy gauge even allows you to slice to a specific thickness, such as $\frac{1}{16}$ or $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. The Matfer mandoline has a waffle blade to make waffled potato chips, but you can't use the protective gripper with it, so you have to stop slicing well before you get to the end of the potato.

The Matfer sliced cucumbers and potatoes easily and produced lovely paper-thin fennel, but it mangled a firm tomato. And the gripper annoyed me to no end. It only works against a flat surface and, even then, only if the chunk isn't too thick.

I quickly jettisoned it—a bad safety decision that cost me a nicked finger.

The Japanese-made **Benriner** (about \$35) has one angled blade that can be removed to replace or sharpen. And it adjusts, albeit awkwardly, to make slices of varying thickness—including paper-thin cucumber and zucchini slices and professional-looking Parmesan shards. Its three julienne blades insert easily, and the narrowest one allows you to make the fine

daikon and carrot strings that Japanese cooks use for garnishes.

But the Benriner disappoints at some tasks. The blade wasn't sharp enough to handle a firm tomato. And thick-cut french fries weren't square because the two slicing plates can't be set far enough apart. I was also bothered that the manufacturer provides only a flimsy plastic sleeve to store the three sharp-toothed blades. And the English translation of the assembly directions are sketchy at best.

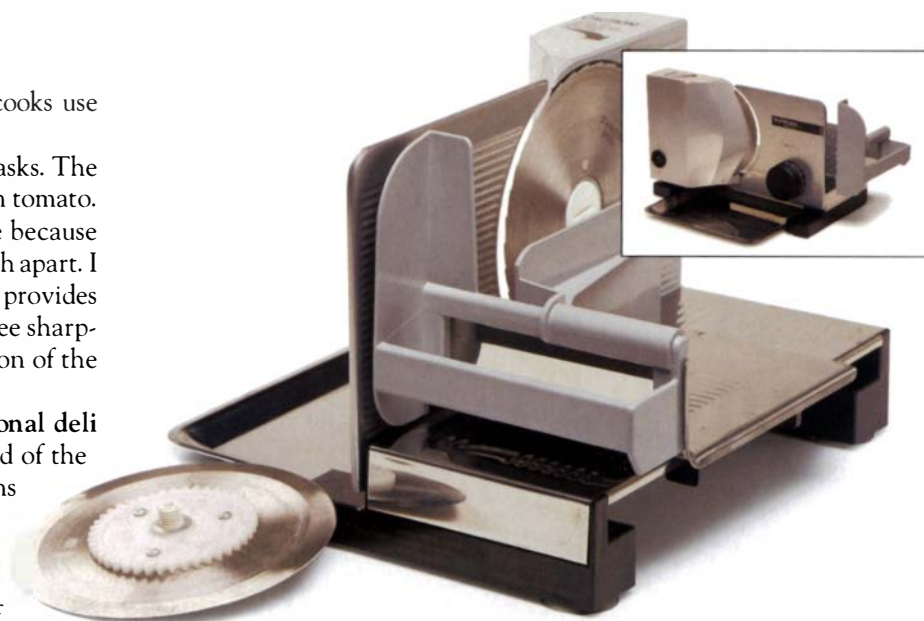
The electric **Chef's Choice professional deli slicer** (about \$200) reminded my husband of the hand-cranked slicers that many Norwegians have at home to slice rye bread for their famous open-face sandwiches. At his suggestion, I bought a hard-crust rye loaf, and the machine made quick work of turning it into neat slices. It made picture-perfect tomato rounds and onion rings that would do any hamburger proud. It can also cut through an acorn squash to make pretty and even rings. But the slicer was too small to handle the whole cooked turkey breast I bought; I had to cut the breast in half to fit. It's also difficult to clean completely, with scraps slipping into inaccessible spots. And I wouldn't want to remove those blades with children around.

As a final test, I tried slicing some nearly frozen beef tenderloin into paper-thin carpaccio. On the thinnest settings, the machine shredded the meat; by setting the gauge higher, however, I got reasonably thin slices that I could then pound between plastic wrap to the appropriate thinness.

As its fans know, a **food processor** purées marvelously and is competent at chopping and kneading. But my comparative tests revealed its flaws as a slicer. You can't slice anything that won't fit in the feed tube (a whole tomato, for example), and unless the items fit in snugly, they won't feed in straight, so your cucumber rounds end up as ovals. Where straight doesn't matter—slicing onions for a sauté, for example—it can handle the job.

This equipment survey persuaded me that each of these slicers could stand some fine-tuning but that all of them offer some benefits to the cook. Myself, I'm sticking by my old trusty mandoline (though the slick Matfer is an improvement over my all-steel model) and keeping a couple of serrated knives handy for ripe tomatoes and crusty breads.

Janet Fletcher, who wrote Fresh from the Farmers' Market (Chronicle Books), has just moved her mandoline and serrated knives to a new home in Napa, California. ♦



Chef's Choice Pro Electric Deli Slicer

Best results: Ham, cured sausages, and other deli meats; semisoft and hard cheeses; bread, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, hard squash, eggplant, lemons, and limes

Not worth trying: Cleaning in the dark! or juliennings; also the gripper doesn't have good prongs so apples and other round fruits tend to get loose



SOURCES

Benriner, The Culinary Institute of America Marketplace (888/424-2433), \$32; Spice Merchant (800/551-5999), \$34.95; The Wooden Spoon (888/431-2207), \$42 (with storage box)

Boerner V-Slicer, Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232), Kitchen Glamor (800/641-1252), \$39.99

Matfer Mandolin, Sur La Table (800/243-0852), Williams-Sonoma (800/541-2233), \$159

Chef's Choice Pro Electric Deli Slicer, Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232), \$199.99 (additional ham blade, \$34.99)

Tiny Pine Nuts Play a Big Role in Cooking

These rich and buttery little nuts—which really do come from pine trees—add flavor and texture to everything from pasta to cookies

BY KAY FAHEY



Pine nuts are small but versatile kitchen treasures. No doubt you love them for the richness they give pesto, and you've probably enjoyed them sprinkled over a salad. And if you live in the southwestern United States, you know how delicious roasted and salted pine nuts are as a snack. But pine nuts, also called *piñones* or *pignoli*, can do much more for you in the kitchen, from thickening sauces to starring in fabulous cookies.

The secret to pine nuts' versatility is a rich, buttery flavor and texture. Biting into a pine nut is something like indulging in a morsel of truly fine chocolate—that soft texture practically melts away and leaves your mouth basking in buttery goodness. The flavor is delicate, floating at the top of the mouth, and yet you continue to savor its unique sweetness long after the nut itself is gone. Learning to take advantage of that unique flavor isn't hard; pine nuts have an affinity to many of the ingredients and techniques you're already using in your kitchen.

Two ways to toast pine nuts



Toasting pine nuts improves their flavor. Toast a few nuts in a skillet on the stovetop, frequently shaking the pan. Or toast a big batch on a sheet pan (left) in the oven. You'll get more even browning in the oven. Either way, keep an eye on the nuts; they brown quickly.

Keep pine nuts fresh and toast them for the fullest flavor

When you're shopping for pine nuts, it's usually cheaper to buy them in bulk in the produce section (where the turnover is better), rather than in the tiny jars you sometimes see in the Italian dry goods section of the grocery store. Look for whole, unbroken nuts. Regardless of where you buy pine nuts, you'll never really know how fresh they are (you'd have to shake them off the tree yourself to be sure), but you can keep them at their best at home by refrigerating them (for up to several weeks) or by freezing them (for up to three months). All nuts eventually go rancid, so before you cook with them, be sure to smell a few and bite

Top photo this page: Kay Fahey. All others, except where noted: Steve Hunter.

into one—if they're bad, you'll detect an unpleasant bitterness.

I find I get the best results when I store pine nuts raw in the refrigerator and toast them just before I want to use them. I also find it's a good idea to soak the raw nuts in water for ten minutes or so before toasting. This step seems to bring out their creamy texture and mild flavor. Then I pat them dry and I'm ready to toast them.

Toasting pine nuts brings out their nutty sweetness. Toasting also tends to minimize the resinous aftertaste truly fresh nuts sometimes carry, so I've gotten in the habit of always toasting pine nuts before using them. The only thing you have to watch for—and you really do have to watch—is to keep the heat under control. Burnt pine nuts aren't pleasant. There are two basic ways to toast pine nuts, both of them straightforward and simple. If you want to toast a bunch of pine nuts at once, the easiest way is in the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F and spread the nuts in a single layer on a heavy baking sheet. Bake until golden, about three to five minutes, keeping a close watch. You may want to rotate the pan after a minute or so to help the nuts cook evenly. As soon as they take on a lovely golden hue (you'll also probably begin to smell them), they're done.

The other method may be easier if you need just a few nuts, say, to sprinkle on a tangy grapefruit salad. Set a small skillet over medium heat for a minute or two. Add the pine nuts and toss every few seconds to make sure they don't burn. You'll only need to cook them for a minute or so. Again, that golden color and nutty aroma are your cues that they're ready.

Beyond salads—pine nuts play an essential role in sweets, stuffings, and sauces

When I first started to cook with pine nuts, I turned to traditional Mediterranean, Asian, and southwestern recipes for guidance. After hundreds of years of cooking with local pine nuts, cooks in these regions have discovered that pine nuts are a natural addition to both baked sweets and savory stuffings, and they can often be the starring ingredient in sauces and dressings. I start by adding pine nuts sparingly to my favorite recipes (they're so rich that you'll find you often don't need a lot), and I just add more if I want them to really stand out in a dish.

The buttery flavor and softly crunchy texture of pine nuts make them perfect in baked sweets, such as cookies, rolls, and cakes. Some traditional



Make a quick pan sauce for sautéed fish. Reduce lemon juice in the pan the fish was cooked in and then add toasted pine nuts and fresh basil.



The nuts provide the crunch. The toasted pine nuts in this pan sauce add textural contrast to sautéed sole and mashed potatoes.

Greek and Italian recipes call for pine nuts to be folded into beaten egg whites and sugar, sometimes along with ground blanched almonds, and then baked at very low heat to make a macaroon-style cookie. Often pine nuts are added to other nuts such as pistachios or almonds and baked with a honey syrup in puff pastry. Chinese cooks blend them into special tea cakes and sprinkle them on top of crispy date-filled cookies.

As a general rule, you can use pine nuts as an alternative to pecans, walnuts, or almonds in your own recipes for baked goods. They work well alone or in combination with other nuts. If you usually use chopped walnuts in shortbread cookies, for example, try replacing them with whole or chopped pine nuts. The pine nut cookie recipe starting on p. 50 will give you an idea of how well their flavor and texture work in cookies. I've also used pine nuts in place of pecans in pancakes (they're especially good in cornmeal pancakes), and I've added them to a batter for carrot cake. And pine nuts are just as delicious baked into savory breads; I like to press toasted



An all-American chocolate pine nut cookie was inspired by traditional Greek and Italian cookies.

Flavors to pair with pine nuts

Over years of experimentation, cooks from the Aegean to Asia have found that pine nuts marry well with certain flavors. You can take these flavor pairings and incorporate them into pasta sauces, pilafs, stuffings, and baked goods such as flatbreads, quick breads, cookies, and cakes.

- ◆ citrusy aromatics like **orange** and **lemon**
- ◆ the fragrant herbs of the northern Mediterranean such as **thyme**, **rosemary**, **basil**, and **bay leaf**
- ◆ southern Mediterranean spices and ingredients such as **saffron**, **dried fruits**, and **grains**
- ◆ sweet-scented spices such as **cinnamon**, **clove**, **nutmeg**, and **allspice**
- ◆ pungent aromatics like **onion**, **garlic**, and **leeks**
- ◆ Asian flavors such as **ginger**, **soy**, and **dry sherry**
- ◆ salty ingredients like **sardines**, **anchovies**, **olives**, and **cheeses**



pine nuts, caramelized onions, fresh herbs, and a little cheese into my focaccia before baking.

Their soft texture—softer than most nuts—helps pine nuts flavor and thicken sauces. Probably the most famous of these is pesto, the Italian blend of pine nuts, basil, and olive oil, with perhaps a touch of nutty cheese like Parmesan. In fact, all over the Mediterranean, pine nuts are used in sauces for pasta, often combined with anchovies or sardines or sautéed with flavorful vegetables like fennel or roasted sweet pepper. I add pine nuts to my favorite pasta sauce, which includes black olives and feta cheese.

Pounded or processed pine nuts are used to thicken sauces. In the Middle East, a creamy tahini and nut sauce called *tarator* (see recipe p. 51) often features pine nuts and is used both as a dip for bread and vegetables and as a sauce for fish. Whole or chopped pine nuts are also used to enhance dressings and vinaigrettes for salads. I like to pair pine nuts with a sweet-and-sour dressing for leafy greens. Or I add them as garnish to a salad that contains a tart fruit or two, like tangerines or blood oranges. Pine nuts can also be incorporated into delicious pan sauces, like the Sicilian sole with lemon, basil, and pine nuts on p. 50.

Pine nuts are traditional additions to stuffings and fillings for meat, poultry, or vegetables such as eggplant. Their subtle yet lasting flavor and melt-in-the-mouth texture are often combined with onion, garlic, and sweet-scented spices like nutmeg, cinnamon, and clove to make a delightful stuffing



for lamb and veal. Or they might be combined with sausage or ground lamb, plump raisins, and citrus seasonings to fill baked eggplant and other earthy vegetables. In China, pine nuts are used in stuffings for baked mushrooms, with seasonings such as fiery-sweet ginger, dry sherry, and a touch of five-spice powder.

I like to use pine nuts in pilafs, adding just enough to have one in every forkful. Since pine nuts also pair so well with saffron, I like to make a saffron rice pilaf, blended with sweet raisins, tangy dried apricots, sautéed onions and pine nuts. And the pilafs themselves, like the basmati rice and pine nut pilaf for Greek-style roasted game hens at right, make great stuffings. I also use pine nuts in savory fillings for cabbage rolls and eggplant.

And sometimes pine nuts can be just plain fun. Along the Mexican border, where chiles are everywhere, folks make a snack of pine nuts and pumpkin seeds tossed in butter, sweetened with a touch of sugar, and zapped with a sprinkling of dried green chile. Now that will set your taste buds working overtime.

However you decide to use pine nuts in your cooking, the recipes that follow, which were gathered from three pine-nut-loving chefs, and the guide to pairing flavors with pine nuts (opposite) will give you a jump-start on taking advantage of their special flavor and texture.

RECIPES

Greek-Style Roasted Game Hens with Pine Nut Pilaf Stuffing

Joyce Goldstein likes to use this rice stuffing studded with pine nuts when roasting chickens or poussins as well as the game hens she suggests here. (Editors' note: The pilaf is highly seasoned because it's being used as a stuffing. If you're serving it alone, you can decrease the amount of allspice to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon.)

Serves four; yields about 3 cups stuffing.

FOR THE STUFFING:

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt; more to taste
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup raw long-grain rice, preferably basmati
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. unsalted butter
1 small onion, diced
2 Tbs. dried currants, plumped in hot water
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. ground allspice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup toasted pine nuts
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. grated lemon zest
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE GAME HENS:

6 Tbs. unsalted butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground allspice
2 cloves garlic, minced
3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
4 Rock Cornish game hens (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. each), rinsed and patted dry

To make the stuffing—In a saucepan, bring 1 cup water to a boil. Add the salt and stir in the rice. Cover, reduce the heat, and simmer over low heat until the

A basmati rice pilaf studded with pine nuts makes a delicious stuffing for Cornish game hens (above) or chicken basted with lemon butter.

Where do pine nuts come from?



The cones (right) of certain pine trees yield a very nutritious, very delicious little nut (unshelled, left; shelled, center).

Pine nuts are harvested from several different species of pine trees throughout the world, and the nuts themselves may be called very different names, depending on their origin. *Pignoli* come from the stone pines of Italy (*Pinus pinea*), pine nuts from the single-leafed piñon trees (*P. monophylla*), which stud the mountains of California and Nevada, and *piñones* from the Colorado piñon (*P. edulis*) of the American Southwest. Smaller harvests of pine nuts, all with local names, are gathered throughout the Mediterranean, Mexico, and central Asia. While not all pine trees yield edible nuts, scientists are aware of almost a dozen varieties of pines that do.

Debate has raged over which pine nuts are tastiest ever since the Spanish arrived in America. (The Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca is reported to have rated the *piñones* of New Mexico “better than those of Castile” because of their conveniently thin shells.) But unless you’re a bona fide connoisseur of pine nuts, chances are they’ll all taste remarkably similar.

In desert mountains all over the world, people have harvested the

pine for centuries as autumn brings cooler temperatures and ripened nuts. Where I live in northern Nevada, locals pile the family into the four-wheel-drive and venture up rocky dirt roads. At about 6,000 feet above sea level, you’ll find the dark green pines with their golden-brown cones already opening. With long sticks, old blankets, and patient work, the timeless ritual of harvest begins. (Timing is everything: If you want to get to the nuts before the birds do, you must shake the just barely opened cones to the ground.)

When survival depended on the pine nut, Native American families gathered basketfuls and then spent hours laboriously cracking shells. Today, pine nuts come conveniently shelled and are more frequently used as an accent instead of a primary ingredient. This is partly because pine nuts (like most nuts) cram a lot of calories and protein into their little shells, and partly because (again, like most nuts), they ain’t cheap. But the best reason to use them sparingly is that they’re so rich and so good that you want every single one to stand out.

water has been absorbed and the rice is fully cooked, 15 to 20 min. Transfer the rice to a mixing bowl and set aside. Melt the butter in a medium sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until tender and translucent, 8 to 10 min. Stir in the currants (drained) and allspice and cook a few minutes more. Stir the onion mixture, pine nuts, and lemon zest into the cooked rice. Season with salt and pepper. Let cool.

To cook the hens—Heat the oven to 400°F. Make a basting sauce by melting the butter and stirring in the allspice, garlic, and lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper and set aside.

Spoon the cooled stuffing into the cavity of the hens. Set the hens on one large or two small racks in a large shallow roasting pan or large sheet pan. Spoon or brush half of the lemon butter over the birds. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and roast, basting occasionally with the butter, until the juices run clear when the leg is pierced with a skewer, 60 to 70 min. The internal temperature of the stuffing should be 160°F. Remove the birds and racks from the pan. Spoon off and discard the fat; pour any juices into a separate container. If there are nicely browned juices in the bottom of the pan, deglaze with a little stock or water and add to the other juices. Serve one bird per person with some of the pan juices, if you like.

Sole Fillets with Pine Nuts, Lemon & Basil

Fortunato Nicotra, the executive chef of Felidia in New York City, likes to serve this simple Sicilian dish of sole with olive-oil mashed potatoes. If you can’t find sole or flounder, use trout or catfish. It’s easier to sauté the fillets in a nonstick skillet, though you’ll have more brown bits to scrape into the sauce if you use a regular pan. *Serves two.*

4 small sole or flounder fillets (about 3 oz. each)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

½ cup toasted pine nuts

¼ cup chopped fresh basil

Season the fillets with salt and pepper. Heat 4 Tbs. of the olive oil in a large skillet over high heat. Sauté the fillets on one side (in batches if necessary) until the edges begin to turn opaque (about 2 min.) and then turn them over and cook for 1 to 2 min. to finish. Transfer the fillets as they’re cooked to a warm plate. When all the fillets are cooked and removed from the pan, carefully pour the lemon juice into the pan, scrape up any browned bits, and boil the juice to reduce it to about 1 Tbs., about 1 min. Add the pine nuts and basil and remove the pan from the heat. Put the fillets on serving plates and spoon the contents of the pan over all. Drizzle the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil over as well.

Chocolate Pine Nut Cookies

Fine Cooking test kitchen director Abigail Johnson Dodge recommends serving these crumbly, rich

butter cookies when they're still slightly warm. *Yields 46 cookies.*

8 oz. unsalted butter, soft and at room temperature
4½ oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar; more for decoration (optional)
1 oz. (⅓ cup plus 1 Tbs.) unsweetened natural (nonalkalized) cocoa powder
1 tsp. vanilla extract
Pinch salt
8 oz. (1¾ cups) all-purpose flour
¾ cup toasted pine nuts, coarsely chopped
¼ cup toasted pine nuts, for garnish

Heat the oven to 325°F. In the large bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter, sugar, cocoa powder, vanilla, and salt until smooth and creamy. Add the flour and chopped pine nuts and mix on low speed until well combined.

Shape 1 Tbs. scoops of dough into round balls and arrange on parchment-lined baking sheets about 1½ inches apart. Flatten each slightly and press 3 pine nuts on top. Bake until the tops look dry, about 18 min. Cool the cookies in the pan for about 5 min. before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely. Dust with confectioners' sugar, if you like.

Creamy Pine Nut & Tahini Sauce (Tarator Sauce)

Joyce Goldstein uses this all-purpose Middle Eastern

sauce for fish, salads, and vegetables, and for dipping warm pita bread. *Yields 1½ cups.*

1 cup pine nuts
2 small cloves garlic, minced
6 Tbs. tahini (sesame seed paste), well stirred
4 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste
1 Tbs. olive oil; more to taste
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Cayenne (optional)
Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley or cilantro for garnish

In a food processor, purée the nuts and garlic until they form a paste. Add the tahini and 4 Tbs. lemon juice and purée. With the machine running, mix in cold water 1 Tbs. at a time until the sauce is thinned to the consistency of sour cream (you'll need ⅓ to ½ cup water). Add 1 Tbs. olive oil (or more) for a slightly more spreadable consistency. Season with salt and pepper and another 1 to 2 Tbs. lemon juice if you like. If you'd like some heat, add cayenne to taste. This sauce thickens as it sits; add cold water as needed to thin it. Garnish with parsley or cilantro and serve at room temperature.

Kay Fahey is a food writer who harvests pine nuts in the Pine Nut Range near her home in Reno, Nevada. ♦

Joyce Goldstein's recipes were adapted from her book, *The Mediterranean Kitchen* (William Morrow).



A food processor grinds pine nuts and garlic to a paste. Add tahini and lemon juice to make tarator sauce.



Serve creamy tarator sauce as a dip for pita or raw vegetables or thin it with olive oil or water and spread over fish before baking.



A light-as-air pie that's full of flavor.
The browned top adds a toasty, caramelized note to the lemony buttermilk filling.

Buttermilk Pie

When my friends in New York compliment my buttermilk pie, I tell them this: In the South, you learn how to bake before you learn how to fry. And then you learn how to walk.

This light, lemony, sweet-yet-tangy custard pie always sells out when it's on my menu. Its flavor recalls a time before refrigeration, when sweet milk wouldn't keep in the summer heat. Instead, people used the slightly sour liquid that remained after milk was churned to butter.

Nowadays, the buttermilk you buy at the supermarket is made from milk that's cultured and fermented until it thickens slightly and takes on that tart flavor that makes much of southern baking—and this pie—so wonderful.

Pay attention to your whites, and use a whisk

When some of my customers see buttermilk pie on the menu, they think of chess

Whipped egg whites give this southern classic a texture that's as light as a soufflé

BY ROBERT STEHLING

pie, another southern classic. Although some versions of chess pie seem similar, my buttermilk pie is nothing like the chess pie I had growing up. In my experience, that pie is a denser, sweeter confection, often with cornmeal in the filling, and found mostly at church bake sales.

My buttermilk pie, on the other hand, is far less sweet and gets its tartness re-

inforced with a squeeze of lemon. More important, egg whites whipped to soft peaks lighten the custard. A slice of this pie reveals a thick, soufflé-like layer resting on a thinner, creamier layer. When you take a bite, you get the best of both: the silky-smooth mouth-feel of the creamy layer and the this-feels-so-light-I-could-eat-it-all-day benefit of the fluffy top layer.

Separate the eggs while cold; whisk at room temperature. When an egg is cold, the white will separate more readily from the yolk, and the yolk is less likely to rupture during the process. But although egg whites separate better just out of the fridge, they whip to their maximum volume at room temperature, in part because the surface tension of the white is lower at room temperature, making it easier for small air pockets to form.

Because egg whites can't mix to their maximum volume if they come into con-

tact with any fat beyond the trace they already contain, you'll want to be sure your bowl—preferably stainless steel; copper is even better—and your whisk are absolutely grease-free. For the same reason, if you do get even a speck of egg yolk in your white, remove it with a knife, or use that egg for scrambling and crack another for this recipe.

It's better to err on the side of under-whipping than over. For a filling with the best texture and optimum volume, you want to mix the whites to incorporate air without overmixing them.

You can whip the egg whites with an electric mixer, but I recommend whipping them by hand because it's too easy to overmix with a machine. Either way start slowly to create small air bubbles, which are more stable than large ones, and then go ahead and whisk more vigorously. Stop whisking the egg whites when you can lift away the whisk and see a definite peak. If the peak droops a little, that's fine: slightly underwhipped egg whites will do less damage than over-whipped ones, which, because the protein bonds have broken, are no longer able to give the pie filling structure. Whites mixed just right will hold a definite shape; overmixed whites will look dull and clumpy.

Gently fold the egg whites and the custard together. When folding the whites and the custard together, use a spatula and a gentle motion to avoid deflating those egg whites that you whipped so carefully.

For the tastiest, flakiest crust, use butter, shortening, and lard

The key to this delicious and incredibly flaky pie crust is the three different fats used. For a truly southern pie, lard is a must. Made from rendered, clarified pork fat, lard makes the flakiest pie crusts. It's available at the supermarket (or you can render your own from freshly trimmed pork fat), and it has a mild, nutlike flavor. Solid at room temperature, lard gives you the same flakiness as vegetable shortening but also adds a richness of flavor that shortening lacks. If you can't get your hands on lard, or if you're a vegetarian, substitute vegetable shortening for the amount of lard called for, and just don't tell your southern friends.



Egg whites whipped to definite peaks give the filling height and fluff. Robert Stehling uses a whisk, rather than a mixer, to help prevent overmixing.



Pour the batter into a baked crust. The filling can go right into a still-hot shell.

RECIPES

Buttermilk Pie

This sweet-tangy pie is just great served with fresh fruit, especially raspberries, and a dollop of whipped cream. Or dress up a slice with a drizzle of berry coulis. *Yields one 9-inch pie.*

6 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 cup sugar
2 eggs, separated
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
¼ tsp. salt
1 cup buttermilk, at room temperature
1 baked pie shell (see recipe at right)

Heat the oven to 350°F. In a mixer, combine the butter and sugar until the sugar is completely incorporated. Add the egg yolks and mix well to combine. Add the flour, lemon juice, nutmeg, and salt. With the mixer running, slowly add the buttermilk. In another bowl, whip the egg whites until they form soft peaks. Pour a little of the buttermilk mixture into the whites; fold gently to combine. Gently fold the egg-white mixture into the remaining buttermilk mixture until just combined. Pour the custard into the baked pie shell. Bake in the middle of the oven until the filling is lightly browned and barely moves when the pie is jiggled, 45 to 50 min. Cool on a rack and serve warm or at room temperature. Refrigerate leftovers.

Perfect Pie Pastry

This recipe will give you dough for two pies crusts; freeze one for future use. *Yields two 9-inch pie crusts.*

13½ oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour
2 tsp. sugar
1 tsp. salt
1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) cold lard, cut into pieces
1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) cold vegetable shortening, cut into pieces
½ cup plus 1½ to 2 Tbs. ice water

In a large bowl, sift together the flour, sugar, and salt. Using just your fingertips, crumble the butter, lard, and shortening together with the flour, pinching until the mixture looks coarse and crumbly, with the butter no larger than pea-size. Dribble in 1 Tbs. of the water, mixing the dough lightly with a fork. Add more water, 1 tsp. at a time, until the dough holds together (pinch a piece between your fingers to test); you may not need all the water.

Divide the dough and gently press each half into a disk with your hands. Refrigerate one disk at least 30 min. before rolling it out; freeze the other disk for future use.

Heat the oven to 400°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough into a 14-inch round about ⅛ inch thick. Place the dough in a 9-inch pie pan and trim all but ½ inch of the overhang, tucking the excess under and crimping the edge. Line the dough with two sheets of foil to cover the crust and weight it with dried beans or pie weights. Bake for 12 min. Remove the weights and the foil and bake until the crust is golden brown, 5 to 8 min. If the crust bubbles, gently push the bubbles down with the back of a spoon.

Robert Stehling is the chef-owner of the Hominy Grill in Charleston, South Carolina. ♦

Making Delicate Potato Gnocchi

Use minimal kneading and master the right flick of the wrist for dumplings that are irresistibly light

BY PAUL BERTOLLI



Sauce the boiled gnocchi with a simple brown butter laced with crisped sage leaves.

Cook the potatoes



Fill a pot with lightly salted cold water, add the potatoes, and simmer them until very tender, about 35 minutes. Drain them in a colander set into the sink and let them rest in their own steam until they're cool enough to handle. Peel them.

I grew up on my mother's gnocchi, and I remember not only their incomparable lightness, but the sight of her shaping them one by one in our kitchen. By the time she had finished, the whole kneading board was covered with plump, ridge-backed dumplings ready to be cooked in boiling water, and then tossed in a long-simmering *ragù* or warmed through and browned with a little Parmesan in the oven. It was easy to eat too many, and often I did.

My mother's method was governed not by a recipe, but by her good instincts and feel for the dough. With a bit of practice, you too can develop a feel for gnocchi. A starchy potato, a short knead, and a little practice flicking small nuggets of dough off the tines of a dinner fork will give you light gnocchi that are great with all kinds of sauces, from a hearty *ragù* to a deliciously simple sauce of brown butter and sage with a dusting of Parmesan.

Gnocchi come in many forms

Because my mother's family is from the Veneto, we always ate potato gnocchi, which are typical of the region; that's the kind I'm making here.



Pass the potatoes through a ricer or the medium plate of a food mill (or through a basket sieve, pressing with a rubber spatula). Add the egg, cream, salt, and nutmeg to the potatoes, mixing well to combine.

Mix the dough



Pour the flour onto a work surface and make a well in the center. Add the potato mixture to the well.

Gnocchi (pronounced NYOH-kee) is a general term that describes boiled, baked, or fried dumplings. You may have come across the other versions that abound throughout Italy: fried and leavened dough, meatball-shaped dumplings made with wild greens and ricotta cheese, or porridge made from semolina enriched with butter and cheese, cut into disks, and browned in a broiler. There are savory gnocchi, sweet gnocchi, and gnocchi to be eaten simply as an appetizer. Gnocchi take on regional names, too. (In Campania, they go by the unsettling name *strangulapreti*—priest stranglers.)

High-starch baking potatoes make the lightest gnocchi

Despite the differences, all gnocchi are composed of a principal flavor ingredient (in this case, mashed potatoes), a binder (here I'm using wheat flour), and a simple seasoning (these are tossed in browned sage butter right before serving) to support and enhance the principal ingredient.

Baking potatoes produce the lightest gnocchi. Large potatoes that are dry, fluffy, and starchy when



With a pastry scraper, cut the flour into the potatoes. Work the dough by cutting, pressing, and turning it over on itself with the pastry scraper.

Shape the dough into dumplings



Keep working until the dough comes together and is soft, supple, and slightly elastic.



Roll the mass into a large log and cut the log into four equal parts. Let the dough rest for 10 minutes.



Roll the logs into ropes about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter, cutting them in half if they're too long to work with.

cooked produce the lightest dough. I've had good results with russets, also known as Idahoes. Yellow Finns, slightly lower in starch, work well, too. Avoid low-starch, "waxy" potatoes—they turn especially gluey when added to flour, producing leaden gnocchi.

Boiling the potatoes in their jackets, draining them in a colander, and letting them dry in their own steam gives you a fluffy, starchy potato that in turn helps you get the lightest, driest, most tender dough. I've tried baking the potatoes for gnocchi, but again, letting boiled potatoes dry on their own makes fluffy, starchy mashed potatoes that are easier to incorporate into the flour, giving you a lighter result.

Use minimal kneading and just enough flour to bind the dough

With the first knead, you'll be mixing the dough until blended. The mass should feel slightly firm, a little sticky, and malleable. Here it's important not

to knead the dough too much, because kneading strengthens the gluten in the flour, producing tough gnocchi.

The amount of flour you'll mix into the gnocchi dough is crucial—you need to straddle the line between not enough and just enough flour. Follow the recipe until you get a good feel for the dough. It should feel soft, pliable, and slightly sticky. Adding too much flour makes the gnocchi heavy; adding too little means they'll fall apart in the boiling pot.

A starchy potato helps give you a light, tender gnocchi dough.

With cutting and shaping, the dough develops elasticity. As you quarter it and roll it into rope-like lengths, the dough becomes firm enough to allow the characteristic scoring of the surface, and to let the dumplings hold their shape in the boiling water. At this point, it's fine to liberally flour the work surface, your hands, and the dough. Any flour that sticks to the gnocchi will dissolve in the boiling water rather than being incorporated into the dough. *(Continued)*



Cut the ropes into nuggets that are a generous $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long. If some of the ropes swell as you cut others, roll them back down to the original diameter.



Dredge a dinner fork in flour and tap off the excess. Hold a dough nugget between your thumb and forefinger, grasping at opposite corners. Position it so a corner points toward you, diamond-like.



Starting where the fork tines begin, and keeping your thumb perpendicular to the tines, roll the dough over the inside tines of the fork, changing from pinching with your thumb and forefinger to pushing gently with your thumb; you're trying to create an ovoid shape.



Let the dumpling fall off the fork, flicking it off gently with your thumb if needed. Your thumb will have shaped a dimple, and the tines will have scored ridges. Flour the fork again (or each dough nugget).



Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making gnocchi on *Fine Cooking's* web site.
<http://finecooking.com>

Transfer the shaped gnocchi to a well-floured sheet pan and then cook them, freezing what you won't use immediately. Gnocchi will hold in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours. If wrapped well, they'll keep in the freezer up to 2 days. (You needn't thaw frozen gnocchi before boiling, but do boil them in batches.)

Cook and sauce the gnocchi



You'll have about 200 gnocchi, but you may want to cook smaller batches so your pot isn't too crowded.



Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil and add the gnocchi. Let them simmer for about five minutes, or until they all float.



Meanwhile, warm a large skillet over high heat and put in the butter. If you're making the entire recipe, work in batches or in two skillets. Raise the heat and add the sage leaves, swirling them in the butter.

Rolling the dumplings over the tines of a dinner fork gives gnocchi their characteristic shape. The fork will mark ridges, and turning with your finger results in a small indentation in the back, as you can see in the photos on p. 57. This scoring and turning isn't just for looks' sake. As you'll taste, the ridges, valleys, and cavity all trap the sauce, which helps add flavor and creates a pleasing texture.

Brown sage butter is a simple, satisfying sauce. To make *burro nocciola*, as it's known in Italian ("brown butter"), you brown whole butter to a deep amber, with darker flecks of slightly caramelized butter. There will be a tiny bit of smoke, but if you get lots of black smoke, you've gone too far. The sage leaves will be quite dark, crisped, and tossed with the pasta as part of the sauce.

RECIPE

Potato Gnocchi with Brown Butter, Sage & Parmesan

This recipe yields a lot of gnocchi, but you can freeze what you don't use. If you're making the entire recipe,

it's easiest to use two skillets or work in batches for browning the butter and tossing the gnocchi. *Yields about 200 gnocchi; serves eight as a first course.*

FOR THE GNOCCHI:

3 russet potatoes or other high-starch variety
(about 1½ lb.)
1 egg, whisked
¼ cup heavy cream
1 tsp. salt
Freshly grated nutmeg (about 12 downward strokes on the grater) or a generous pinch of ground nutmeg
9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE BROWN BUTTER:

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter
24 medium-size fresh sage leaves
Half a lemon
Salt
Parmigiano-reggiano cheese for grating

Review the text and follow the photos and captions starting on p. 54.

Paul Bertolli, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the chef and co-owner of Oliveto in Oakland, California. ♦



Brown the butter (without burning it) to a deep amber, crisping the sage leaves during this process. You'll see darker flecks of butter solids; this is fine. Add a squeeze of lemon and take the pan off the heat.



Drain the gnocchi thoroughly and toss them into the pan. Season with a little salt.



Gently toss the gnocchi in the browned sage butter, stirring occasionally to make sure none is sticking to the bottom. Divide among eight warmed plates, drizzling any remaining brown butter over the pasta. Grate the Parmesan over each portion and serve at once.



Exploring the

This tart tropical fruit brings an appealing pucker to marinades, sauces, stir-fries—even drinks and sorbets

BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

Three forms of the same great flavor. Clockwise from top, whole tamarind pods, compressed, and concentrate. The author thinks the first two forms deliver the best flavor.

The next time you reach for a lemon to add a pleasantly sour touch to a dish, try turning to tart tamarind instead. You'll be in good company, joining the ranks of cooks from all over the world who add the pulp of this tropical fruit to a wide range of dishes—sauces, marinades, salads, stir-fries, even sorbets and cool, refreshing summer drinks. I think you'll find, as I have, that the bit of prep work necessary to transform tamarind's bean-like pods into a fruity-tart purée is quick and easy to do.

Taking its English name from the Arabic, *tamar-hindi*, meaning "Indian date," tamarind is typically used in equatorial cuisines, such as Indian, Mexican, and Thai. If you've been to an Indian restaurant lately, chances are that a bowl of tamarind chutney hit the table not long after you were seated.

Tamarind's flavor is potent but elusive

With its distinct sweet-sour flavor, a little tamarind goes a long way. Depending on its context, tamarind can express a big, bold personality. It can also whisper its presence, providing a now-you-taste-it-now-you-don't background for other flavors in a dish. Somewhat chameleon-like, tamarind changes its personality depending on the dominant flavors of the ingredients with which it shares billing. Supporting ingredients often include a hint of sugar, fresh chiles, aromatics such as garlic, ginger, and shallots, coconut milk, or a blend of some or all of the above.

Find the form that best suits your dish

Tamarind may be a bit hard to find in an ordinary grocery store, depending on where you live, so you may need to go to a specialty or ethnic grocer, or you can buy it by mail-order; see Sources on p. 76. Sev-



Bright and sassy, this red pepper and tamarind "ketchup" is delicious on grilled burgers and fish.

Vivid Flavor of Tamarind

eral forms of tamarind are available. I prefer to use either the whole pods or the compressed pulp whenever I have the luxury of a few minutes' extra time because I find that these forms are more reliably flavorful, and more complex in flavor, than other forms.

Whole dried pods with their hard, brown skin are commonly packaged in cellophane bags. Store the pods in a cool, dark place. To use the whole pods, peel them with your fingers and then remove the sturdy fibers that enclose the fruit (similar to the process of "stringing" beans).

To get about a cup of usable tamarind (enough for a dish serving four people), start with about 4½ ounces of the dried pods, remove the fruit from the pods (you should have about 3 ounces), and soak it for about 20 minutes in about 1 cup of warm water. Pour the soaking water through a fine sieve into a bowl, and then press the pulp through the sieve into the soaking water (the solids will resemble a soft prune purée). Stir to combine, transfer to a glass jar, seal tightly, and refrigerate (for up to a week).

Compressed tamarind is sold in one-pound blocks—pulp, seeds, and all. Unopened, it can be stored indefinitely in a cool, dark place. After opening, store it in the refrigerator; it will stay good for at least three months. I simply cut off the amount I want to use with a sharp, heavy knife.

To process, combine about 2 ounces of the pulp with 5 ounces hot water. Soak and strain the compressed tamarind as you would the whole pods. This yields about ¾ cup sauce. If you want a very intense concentrate, soak the pulp, discard the soaking water and then push the softened pulp through a sieve.

Frozen, unsweetened pulp is usually packed in 14-ounce pouches. It's especially useful for dishes where you want a thinner, less intense tamarind flavor. Well wrapped, the pulp keeps indefinitely in the freezer. I break it into 1- or 2-ounce pieces and store them in heavy-gauge zip-top bags for easy retrieval.

Frozen tamarind nectar is ready to use and is packaged in 12-ounce plastic bottles or cans. It's already sweetened and ready to dilute for iced drinks. When combined with sweet citrus juices, the nectar becomes an excellent base for low-fat frozen desserts such as granitas or sorbets. I particularly like to combine tamarind with tangerine or pink grapefruit juice.

Sweetened tamarind syrup is ready to use. It's best in iced drinks or as a topping for tropical sundaes.

Tamarind concentrate is usually packaged, also ready to use, in 8-ounce plastic jars. It's a thick, dark unsweetened paste. This works well in salad dressings because it dissolves easily when whisked with a bit of vinegar or lemon juice. It's so highly concentrated that you can just spoon out a tiny bit to add

Coaxing the usable pulp from the fruit



Start by soaking the fruit from whole tamarind pods or the compressed form of tamarind (above) in warm water for about 20 minutes.



Push the softened tamarind through a sieve to get the thick pulp. Use it straight or mixed with the soaking liquid.



Stir-fried beef and broccoli get a tangy appeal from a tamarind marinade that doubles as a sauce.

zing to your sauce. Avoid the concentrates that contain sweeteners and artificial flavors or colors.

Adjusting tamarind's flavor to your taste

What seems too tart to some might be just right to others, so when you're cooking with tamarind you may want to sweeten things a bit. Add sugar gradually, tasting as you go to reach just the right balance.

While tamarind does pair beautifully with aromatics such as ginger, garlic, and chiles, I avoid combining herbs and tamarind in any form, other than adding a whiff of fresh cilantro to a tamarind-based soup at the last minute. I think the flavors become muddled, more becomes less.

Tamarind tenderizes as it flavors

Besides adding flavor, tamarind delivers another bonus when it's used in a marinade. The fruit's natural acidity helps to tenderize tougher cuts of beef, breaking down the fibers in the meat. Marinated overnight in a tamarind-tinged liquid, beef becomes succulent and tender—a great technique for less expensive cuts. But be careful when marinating fish or chicken: if left in the marinade too long, the tamarind will begin to chemically “cook” it. Tamarind's rich, brown color also deepens the color of a marinade, which can make a wonderful sauce when reduced.

Stir-Fried Tamarind Beef

I like to use flank steak here; its full beefy flavor stands up to the marinade. Feel free to modulate the heat by reducing the number of chiles. *Serves four.*

2 Tbs. tamarind concentrate or undiluted pulp from compressed tamarind (see p. 61)

¼ cup soy sauce

2 Tbs. sugar

Juice of 1 lemon

3 cloves garlic, crushed and finely minced

1 to 2 dried red chiles (more or less to taste), cored, seeded, and crumbled

1 lb. flank steak, thinly sliced across the grain

Oil for stir-frying

1 bunch bok choy (about 1 lb.), cut into ¾-inch slices

1 small head broccoli, cut into small florets (about 2 cups)

Cooked rice (optional)

In a small bowl, combine the tamarind, soy sauce, sugar, and lemon juice. Stir until the sugar is dissolved. Add the garlic and chiles.

Put the beef in a shallow dish, pour the marinade over it, and marinate in the refrigerator for about 30 min., turning several times.

Take the meat from the marinade and drain it well so it's not dripping wet; reserve the marinade. Heat a wok or large heavy skillet until very hot. Add a small amount of oil and swirl the pan to coat. Add about half of the meat and cook over high heat, tossing and stirring constantly, just until the meat is no longer pink, about 1 min. Transfer it to a bowl and keep it warm. Repeat with the rest of the meat, again transferring it to the bowl.

When all the meat is cooked and removed from the pan, add a bit more oil to the pan. When it's hot, add the bok choy and broccoli. Stir-fry the vegetables until hot and slightly wilted, about 3 min. Transfer to the bowl with the meat. Pour the marinade into the wok and bring it to a boil over high heat. Cook until slightly thickened and glossy. Return the meat and vegetables to the wok and stir gently to coat with sauce. Serve immediately, with rice if you like.

Quick ways to incorporate tamarind into your cooking

- ◆ Add a spoonful or so of unsweetened pulp at the last moment to a mix of sautéed vegetables for a refreshingly acidic finish.
- ◆ Dissolve 2 tablespoons of sweetened tamarind nectar in 2 cups of cold water, add ice, and a wedge of lemon for a Mexican-style *agua fresca*.
- ◆ Add tamarind concentrate to fresh tangerine or orange juice, sweeten to taste with sugar, and freeze into a refreshing granita.
- ◆ Make a salad dressing with tamarind, lemon juice, a bit of brown sugar, and olive oil—good for strongly flavored greens with apples and cashews.

Roasted Red Pepper Ketchup with Tamarind Accent

With the underlying tart note provided by tamarind, this somewhat chunky conserve blends sweet, tart, and spicy in one brick-red mouthful. I like to top a grilled turkey burger or fatty fish, such as tuna or salmon, with this ketchup. Sometimes I'll purée it and brush it onto chicken pieces during the last few minutes of grilling. A spoonful gives some oomph to a bowl of vegetarian chili. *Yields about 1¾ cups.*

3 large red bell peppers (about 1¼ lb. total)
3 oz. compressed tamarind pulp (a ¾-inch-thick piece about 1x4 inches)
1 cup hot water
½ cup packed brown sugar
½ cup white-wine or rice vinegar
1 tsp. salt
12 cloves, freshly ground, or ¼ tsp. ground cloves
3 cinnamon sticks, 3 inches long, freshly ground, or 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. coarsely ground black peppercorns
1 fresh chile, halved and seeded, or 1 small dried chile, or 1½ tsp. dried red chile flakes
1 medium onion, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)

Heat the broiler and line a baking sheet with foil. Put the peppers on the sheet and broil them, turning occasionally, until the skin is blackened and the peppers are tender, about 10 min. Let them cool and then peel them. Cut them in half, remove the stems, ribs, and seeds, cut the flesh into a ¼-inch dice, and set aside.

In a small bowl, soak the tamarind in the hot water until soft, about 15 min. Put the tamarind pulp in a fine sieve, leaving the soaking liquid in the bowl. Pressing hard, force as much of the pulp as possible through the sieve and into the bowl of soaking liquid. Whisk to combine and set aside.

In medium saucepan, combine the brown sugar, vinegar, tamarind liquid, and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and add the red peppers, cloves, cinnamon, peppercorns, chile, and onion. Cook over low heat, stirring occasionally for about 45 min., until the vegetables are tender and the liquid has thickened to the consistency of chutney. Remove the fresh or dried chile, if you used it. Allow the ketchup to cool and then store it in a tightly covered glass jar, refrigerated. It will keep well in the refrigerator for about a month.

Whole Roasted Snapper with Tamarind

For this Indonesian-inspired dish, I like a firm-textured fish such as red snapper, striped bass, or grouper. Although the fish is traditionally deep-fried, I simplify and lighten things a bit by roasting it instead. If you don't have time to marinate the fish overnight, simply bake the fish in its marinade for full effect and serve the pan juices as the sauce. *Serves four.*

6 oz. compressed tamarind pulp (a ¾-inch-thick piece about 2x4 inches)
2 cups hot water

8 large cloves garlic, crushed and finely minced (about 2 Tbs.)

3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh ginger

2 Tbs. chopped shallots

2 dried hot chiles (or more to taste), coarsely chopped with seeds

2 Tbs. palm sugar (available canned in Asian markets) or brown sugar

1 tsp. salt

1 whole snapper (about 2 lb.), boned and well cleaned, scales and gills removed

3 large tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced, or a 28-oz. can of whole tomatoes, juice and seeds squeezed out, flesh coarsely chopped

A few sprigs of fresh cilantro

Soak the tamarind in the hot water until soft, about 15 min. Put the tamarind pulp in a fine sieve set over the bowl of soaking liquid and press hard to extract as much of the pulp as possible. Stir in the garlic, ginger, shallots, chiles, and sugar and set aside.

Lightly salt the fish inside and out. Make 4 diagonal cuts about ½-inch deep on both sides of the fish. Put the fish in a large dish, pour the marinade over it, cover, and refrigerate. Marinate overnight (or 30 min., if you're going to bake the fish in the sauce), turning the fish occasionally to ensure even marination.

Heat the oven to 375°F. If you've marinated the fish overnight, transfer it to a baking dish and reserve the marinade. Scatter the tomatoes over and around the fish and bake for about 40 min., or until the flesh feels firm and looks opaque with no signs of pink. (If you have only let the fish marinate for 30 min., put the fish, marinade, and tomatoes into the baking dish. Bake until done, about 45 min.)

While the fish is baking, put the reserved marinade in a heavy, medium saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally to prevent burning. Remove from the heat and keep warm. When the fish is cooked, drain off any juices that have collected in the baking dish and add them to the sauce. Transfer the cooked fish to a heated serving platter and coat the fish with the sauce. Decorate with the cilantro.



A sweet-and-sour tamarind sauce gives a whole roasted snapper an Indonesian flavor.

Robert Wemischner wrote *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook*. He teaches professional baking and culinary arts classes in Los Angeles. ♦

Coffee Desserts Offer

A chocolate torte, a tea cake, ice cream, and an update of an old favorite—*tiramisú*—get sophisticated appeal from coffee

BY JOANNE CHANG

When I'm writing a restaurant dessert menu, I feel a bit like Goldilocks in my quest to create a selection of sweets that's "just right." I try to balance the offerings so that all diners will find something that appeals to them. Chocoholics crave rich and dark chocolate desserts; other customers like to end their meal with something light and fruity; vanilla—no surprise here—is always a huge hit. But of all the flavors I have to work with, the one that I love the most is coffee. Why? Coffee is rich without being overwhelming. Its bitter edge elevates a dessert from one-dimensional sweetness to refined sophistication. And coffee as a flavoring couldn't be easier to use. Adding it to custards, ice creams, cakes, and fillings usually consists of little more than grinding some beans

and can even be as easy as opening a jar of instant coffee.

Different forms—bean, powder, and liquid—give you flavoring options

I love *eating* coffee desserts because I am addicted to the bittersweet flavor; I love *making* coffee desserts because coffee is a snap to use. Its intense flavor can be added to a dessert in a variety of ways.

Whole beans pack the most flavor. For the most intense coffee flavor, I turn to whole beans, preferably espresso roast. Using whole beans that I crush or grind myself appeals to the purist in me. But more important, whole beans have more flavor than preground, since coffee loses its flavor and aroma exponentially after being ground. To extract even more flavor from

Layer a light coffee custard and coffee-soaked cake for *tiramisú*

Start with a coffee sabayon. This eggy mixture needs careful whisking over gentle heat to prevent curdling. When you can see the bottom of the bowl, you're done. After cooling, mascarpone and cream are added.



Give the sponge cake a good soaking for the best texture. Here, a generous amount of black coffee is brushed onto the cake to make it very moist.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Sweetness, with a Bite

Joanne Chang
grates bitter
chocolate over
her *tiramisú*. A
cheese grater
makes shaving
chocolate a breeze.



**A *tiramisú* that
you can eat...and
eat...and eat.** The
delicate sponge
cake makes this
dessert light; the
coffee makes it
not too sweet.

the beans, I roast them in the oven for a few minutes to encourage their flavorful oils to emerge.

If I'm infusing a custard or an ice-cream base with coffee flavor, I crush the beans coarsely, with a rolling pin or a food processor, and steep them in the liquid (the pieces get strained out later). If they're going into cookie or cake batter, I grind the beans finer.

Instant coffee and instant espresso add flavor quickly. I recommend that people always keep a jar of instant espresso powder or instant coffee in the fridge. I like these freeze-dried forms because they add flavor

Make an espresso-flecked brittle to add a toasty crunch to coffee ice cream

With a rolling pin and a little brute force, you've got crushed coffee beans. "Putting the beans in a zip-top bag keeps them from flying all over the kitchen," says Joanne Chang.



immediately, without needing to steep as beans do. For instance, you can mix a little powder into ganache or pastry cream while it's warm to quickly give coffee flavor to the dessert. And instant offers the convenience of "brewing" just a cup at a time. It also allows for a more standard result, since people brew coffee so differently, ranging from really weak to really strong.

Coffee liqueurs add sweet coffee flavor with a zing. When I want to jazz up a dessert, I turn to coffee liqueurs like Kahlúa and Tia Maria. For example, I'll mix some into vanilla *crème anglaise* for a coffee-spiked custard sauce. Because the alcohol-based



When you add the crushed coffee beans to hot caramel, the caramel will foam and spurt. Just keep swirling the pan until the caramel turns brown.

flavors diminish when cooked, I generally add liqueurs to desserts after they're cooked. An exception is the filling for the *ûramisú* that follows; because the sabayon is cooked only briefly over low heat, I add the liqueur with the other ingredients.

Brewed coffee works best to bolster other forms of coffee. I find that using brewed coffee as the only coffee flavoring in a recipe doesn't pack enough coffee flavor, so I almost always use it in conjunction with another form of coffee, a sort of coffee reinforcement.

Go ahead and use decaf if you prefer. The process of decaffeination deprives coffee beans of some of their aroma and flavor, but a good brand of decaffeinated will work fine in these recipes.

Coffee pairs well with many favorite dessert flavors

Coffee and chocolate is a wonderful, if common, pairing that has its own name—mocha. Cinnamon is also delicious with coffee; cappuccino often comes sprinkled with it. In fact, the three flavors together are divine. I also like to pair coffee and caramel because they're both strong flavors that play well off each other, as in the espresso brittle recipe that follows. Besides these traditional coffee combinations, a few others stand out.

Rich nuts round out the sharply intense flavor of coffee. I'm partial to the combination of coffee and almonds—I love toasted almonds sprinkled on coffee ice cream. Hazelnuts are great as well. Try adding a scant cup of chopped hazelnuts to the coffee tea-cake recipe; the coffee flavor is less pronounced, but the addition of the hazelnuts creates a new and delicious flavor altogether. Adding vanilla to coffee desserts produces a similar result.



Tilting the baking sheet while the brittle is hot encourages it to spread. Use a metal spatula to spread it even thinner for a more delicate crunch.

RECIPES

Coffee Ice Cream with Espresso Brittle Swirl

Coffee ice cream is the author's favorite dessert; try this recipe and you'll see why. *Yields about 1 quart.*

2 cups heavy cream
2 cups milk
½ cup coffee beans, roasted for 10 minutes at 400°F and crushed
8 egg yolks
¾ cup sugar
1 recipe Espresso Brittle (at right)

In a medium saucepan, heat the cream, milk, and crushed coffee beans to just under a boil. Remove from the heat and let stand at least 1 hour for the beans to infuse their flavor. In a medium bowl, whisk together the egg yolks and sugar. Pour the cream mixture into the egg yolks, whisking until well blended. Return this mixture to the saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it thickens slightly, enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Strain the custard through a fine mesh sieve and chill. Freeze in an ice-cream maker following the manufacturer's instructions. When frozen but still soft, transfer the ice cream to a stainless-steel bowl and swirl in the chopped brittle with a spatula. Cover the ice cream tightly with plastic wrap and freeze. Gar-



nish with the remaining shards of brittle, when serving, if you like.

Espresso Brittle

Yields about 1 cup.

1 cup sugar
¼ cup water
2 Tbs. espresso beans, crushed with a rolling pin or chopped in a food processor to medium-fine crumbs
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) butter
Pinch salt

Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment and spray the parchment with nonstick cooking spray or grease it lightly. In a medium heavy-based saucepan, combine the sugar and water. Heat over high heat, swirling the pot occasionally (don't stir it) for even color, until it turns light amber. Add the crushed espresso beans (don't worry if the sugar seems to foam), swirl them around in the caramel, and continue to cook until the caramel turns brown. Remove the pan from the heat. Carefully whisk in the butter and salt (the butter will sputter). Immediately pour the brittle onto the prepared baking sheet, quickly tilting the baking sheet to get the brittle to flow into a thin layer (be careful—the brittle is very hot). As it cools and slows down, use a metal spatula to spread it into an even thinner layer. Let cool. Chop two-thirds of the

Coffee ice cream gets a swirl of brittle crunch.

Reserve some of the brittle and snap off a few pieces for a garnish.



A rich chocolate torte benefits from the smoky depth of ground espresso beans.

Add a teaspoon of instant coffee to a cup of cream before whipping it for a “*café au lait*” garnish.

cooled brittle into small pieces by sealing it in a plastic bag and smashing it with a mallet or rolling pin. Sift the crumbs in a strainer if you don't want the powder. Break the remaining brittle into shards and use them to garnish bowls of the ice cream.

Chocolate Espresso Torte

This extremely deep, rich, and dark cake tastes great with whipped cream. *Serves ten.*

- 5 oz. semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 3 oz. unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- ¼ lb. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces; more for the pan
- 4 eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup brewed espresso or double-strength coffee, cooled to room temperature
- 1 Tbs. sifted, finely ground espresso beans (from about 1 heaping Tbs. whole beans)
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour; more for the pan

Brew a strong cup of coffee for best results in baking

To get the most flavor when using brewed coffee in a recipe, I almost always use espresso because it has a strong, dark flavor. But that's at the restaurant, where I have access to an espresso machine. At home, I use regular coffee at double-strength. For example, most coffee makers suggest using 1 rounded teaspoon for every 6 ounces of water, so I use 2 rounded teaspoons. (Keep in mind that when making espresso, the amount of water called for, whether instant or whole beans, is only about 3 ounces, not the 6 ounces used for regular coffee.) For instant coffee, I recommend the same: use twice the powder for the amount of water that's called for.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch cake pan and line the bottom with kitchen parchment. Butter the parchment and lightly flour the pan, shaking out the excess.

In a small, heavy-based saucepan over medium heat, melt the chocolates and butter, stirring frequently. Set aside. Using the whisk attachment of a stand mixer, whip the eggs, sugar, brewed espresso, ground espresso beans, and salt on medium-high speed until thick and voluminous, at least 8 min. Turn the mixer to low and mix in the butter-chocolate mixture. Turn off the mixer. Sift the flour over the batter and fold until all the ingredients are fully incorporated. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until a skewer inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean, 25 to 30 min. Cool in the pan on a rack for 10 min. Set a plate over the torte and carefully invert the torte onto the plate; peel off the parchment. Flip the torte back onto the rack to cool completely before slicing.

Tiramisú

Even people who thought they ate enough *tiramisú* in the '80s to last them a lifetime love this dessert. It's light, sophisticated, and not too sweet. What makes this *tiramisú* deliciously different is that the cake itself is flavored with coffee. *Serves ten.*

FOR THE COFFEE-FLAVORED SPONGE CAKE:

- 4 eggs, separated
- ⅔ cup sugar, divided
- ¼ cup hot brewed espresso
- 4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour
- Pinch salt

FOR THE MASCARPONE FILLING:

- 4 egg yolks
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup coffee liqueur, such as Kahlúa or Tia Maria
- Pinch salt
- ¾ cup mascarpone
- ½ cup heavy cream

FOR ASSEMBLY:

- 1 cup hot brewed espresso or double-strength coffee
- 1 oz. unsweetened chocolate

For the sponge cake—Heat the oven to 350°F. Line a rimmed sheet pan or jelly roll pan measuring 14x11 inches or 15x10 inches (or quite close to those measurements) with kitchen parchment. Using a stand mixer with its whisk attachment or an electric mixer, beat the egg yolks, ⅓ cup of the sugar, and the hot espresso on high until thick and voluminous, at least 6 min. In another bowl and with clean beaters, whisk the egg whites on medium speed. When they reach the soft-peak stage, slowly add the remaining ⅓ cup sugar with the mixer running. Increase the speed to medium high and beat until the whites are glossy and smooth with peaks that hold their shape without drooping, another 1 or 2 min. Fold one-third of the whites into the yolk mixture to lighten them, and then gently fold in the rest of the whites.

Sift the flour and salt over the top of the mixture and fold it in gently. Spread the batter evenly on the

prepared sheet pan. Bake until the center of the cake springs back when lightly pressed and the cake doesn't stick to your fingers, 12 to 14 min. Remove from the oven and cool for 5 min. Run a knife around the edge of the cake and invert it onto a cooling rack. Gently peel off the parchment and allow the cake to cool completely.

For the filling—Set a pan of water to simmer and fill a large bowl with ice. In a medium stainless-steel bowl, whisk together the egg yolks, sugar, coffee liqueur, and salt. Set the bowl over, but not touching, the simmering water and whisk until the mixture thickens, the whisk leaves ribbons trailing off of it, and you can see the bottom of the bowl when you scrape the whisk along the bottom, 6 to 7 min. Cool the yolk mixture by setting the bowl on the ice bath and whisking the mixture occasionally. Meanwhile, whisk together the mascarpone and cream until it holds peaks. When the yolk mixture is cool, gently fold in the cream mixture until combined. Keep the mixture cool.

For assembly—Divide the sponge cake into thirds (three rectangles about 4½x11 or 5x10 inches). Lay one of the cake rectangles on the bottom of a rectangular pan (I use a Pyrex baking dish). Brush its top liberally with one-third of the hot espresso. Spread just under half of the mascarpone filling over the cake. Grate about one-third of the unsweetened chocolate on top of the mascarpone. Repeat with another layer of cake, espresso, mascarpone filling, and chocolate. Top with the last layer of cake, brush on the last of the coffee, spread on a very thin layer of mascarpone, and grate the rest of the chocolate on top. Refrigerate for several hours or overnight before serving. Slice and serve.

Coffee “Tea” Cakes

These little cakes look like scones but have a moister, more cake-like texture. *Yields 8 tea cakes.*

9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour
¾ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. baking soda
⅔ cup packed light brown sugar
1½ Tbs. finely ground coffee beans (from about 1 heaping Tbs. whole beans)
1 stick (8 Tbs.) cold butter, cubed
⅓ cup heavy cream
1 tsp. vanilla extract
⅓ cup cold brewed espresso or double-strength coffee
1 tsp. packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. sugar

Heat the oven to 350°F. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment or a regular mixer with beaters, combine the flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda, ⅔ cup brown sugar, and the ground coffee beans. Add the butter and mix on low speed until the pieces of butter are the size of marbles. Add the cream, vanilla, and cold espresso and continue mixing until the dough just comes together. Pat the dough onto an ungreased baking sheet into a round about 6 inches in diameter. Mix the 1 tsp. brown sugar with the white sugar to make it “sprinkleable.” Sprinkle the round lightly with the sugar and cut it into 8 triangles. Bake until firm but still springy, 40 to 50 min. Remove from the oven and cool. Cut into wedges along the lines.

Joanne Chang is the pastry chef at Mistral in Boston. She'll soon open her own pastry shop, Flour, in Boston. ♦



The perfect cake with tea—or coffee. These coffee-flavored scone-like treats are best eaten when still warm.

Trimming and coring fresh pineapple



Begin by trimming the leaves and the base. Set the pineapple on its side. Using a large chef's knife, cut along the shoulder of the fruit, about an inch below the long pointy leaves, to remove all traces of the fibrous top. Then slice off about ½ inch of the base so the fruit will stand upright.

Many supermarket produce departments have a gadget that will peel and core a pineapple in a snap, but it's better to do it yourself at home. A whole pineapple stays fresh longer, and you get the best yield by cutting it yourself.



Remove the rind. Stand the pineapple on a cutting board and cut off vertical strips of rind, following the contours of the fruit and cutting deep enough to remove the dark, prickly spots known as eyes. After removing all the rind, go back and trim away any remaining eyes.



For rings, cut the peeled, uncored pineapple into thin or thick rounds. Punch out the core from each slice using a small, round cookie cutter (or use the tip of a paring knife).

For wedges, chunks, or bite-size pieces, cut the fruit lengthwise into quarters. Cut away the woody core by slicing along the length of each piece just under the core. Then slice into wedges or chunks.



How to cut fat into flour

Whether you're making pie crusts, biscuits, or shortcakes, one of the first steps is to cut the fat into the flour—a shorthand way of telling you to break the fat into small pieces and coat them with flour. How much you cut in the fat affects the texture of the final pastry, and to a lesser extent, so does the tool you use.

The more thoroughly you cut in the fat, the more you

“shorten” the dough, and the more homogenous, crumbly, and shortbread-like it will be. Recipes that say to cut in until the dough resembles coarse cornmeal are going for a tender result. For pie crusts and biscuits that are meant to be flaky, the recipe should tell you to leave some of the fat in pea-size pieces, with the rest in crumb-like bits to ensure some tenderness. (If the pieces of



For the most control, use your fingertips to rub fat into flour.

fat are too big, you'll get gaping holes in the pastry where the fat was.)

Start with well-chilled fat and work quickly. In hot weather, chill the flour and the bowl, too. Start with mini pats of butter (cut a stick lengthwise into quarters and then into thin pats) or small chunks of shortening, lard, or suet, and toss them in the flour, distributing them evenly before cutting in.

Water bath vs. double boiler

Two ways to use hot water to modulate cooking heat

Water baths and double boilers are the cook's solution to making or warming delicate foods, particularly egg-based sauces or custards, that would curdle, break, or scorch with too much heat. In a water bath, the dish is surrounded by hot or simmering water, and in a double boiler, the food is in a bowl suspended above it. In both cases, the water tempers the heat to permit gentle, even cooking.

A water bath, also called a *bain marie* (bahn mah-REE), consists of any heatproof dish of food that's set directly in a

larger, shallow container of hot or simmering water. In the oven, a water bath keeps baking custards, terrines, and mousses from overheating, and on the stovetop, it lets you warm or reheat any number of things without constant attention.

For **ovenbound water baths**, pour in enough

simmering water to reach half to three-quarters of the way up the sides of the mold (so the top portion doesn't overcook), replenishing it when necessary during baking. To avoid accidentally sloshing water into the food, I add boiling water from a kettle after I've put the pan in the oven. To prevent a skin from forming on a smooth custard, cover the mold or ramekins with foil.

A **stovetop water bath** is a common restaurant method for, say, keeping a fragile cream sauce warm or reheating a thick

soup. Try it when you're serving a large or elaborate meal and you need to keep several dishes warm while finishing the rest. Tall, cylindrical pans or canisters are the most space efficient when you have several items in a water bath.

For both types of water bath, I often lay a folded towel on the bottom of the larger pan. The towel keeps ramekins from rattling around, and it's added insulation from the heat.

A **double boiler** is the right choice for food that needs gentle cooking and simultaneous whisking, stirring, or blending with other ingredients: hollandaise or sabayons, melting chocolate, or stirred custards. A double boiler consists of two pans that fit together snugly—the top pan holds the food; the bottom holds simmering water. If you don't own a set of double-boiler pans, improvise one by nesting a metal bowl on top of a saucepan.

Unlike a water bath, the water in a double boiler doesn't touch the top pan or bowl. The cushion of hot air between the water and the food helps keep the temperature constant and the food from overheating. If your sauce does start to curdle or if melting chocolate threatens to scorch, simply lift off the top pan (or bowl, using a pot holder) for a minute before continuing.

Despite the name, don't let double boilers boil. You'd be surprised how fast boiling water evaporates, leaving you with no more water, too much heat, and a burned pan. Also, if the top pan or bowl isn't a tight fit, steam escaping from boiling water in the lower pan can interfere with your recipe.



A double boiler works well for two-handed cooking.



A water bath is for food that doesn't need monitoring.

Many tools, one technique. My favorite tool for cutting in is my hands. As I rub the bits of fat between my fingertips and thumbs, I control just how flaky my biscuits will be. Don't use your palms: they're too warm.

For large jobs, or if I'm pressed for time, I rely on a food processor fitted with the metal blade. It takes just a few short pulses to cut in the fat. Stop as soon as you have the desired texture; a few super-fluous pulses will make the

consistency too fine.

Another efficient tool is a hand-held pastry blender with several parallel curved metal tines (rigid blades seem to work better than flexible wires). Press the tines into the fat, tossing the pieces in the flour and stopping occasionally to scrape the fat from the tines. A fork works the same way except that you need to be more

careful not to smear the fat. Some pastry-supply stores sell forks with wide-spaced tines just for this purpose, but it's



To cut in with two knives, drag the blades through the fat until the pieces are pea-size or smaller.

difficult to get good results unless you're very adept.

You can also cut in fat using two table knives. With a knife in each hand, drag the knife blades through the flour and fat, sliding the blades across each other to trap the fat, cutting the fat into smaller and smaller pieces.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Robust Oregano

Oregano seems like a straightforward enough herb. Anyone who has tasted a tomato-sauce-topped pizza can recall its flavor, which is hearty and assertive with a peppery bite and a zing. Yet once you take a closer look at oregano, things get a little confusing.

Many plants are loosely classified as oregano. Their flavor depends largely on where they're cultivated; in general the hotter the sun, the stronger the flavor. To add to the confusion, some reference books call oregano "wild marjoram," and many recipes suggest that the two herbs, both members of the mint family, are interchangeable. In fact, there are so many varieties of oregano that Art Tucker, an herb expert at Delaware State University, suggests that rather than thinking of oregano as a specific plant, one ought to think of it as a particular flavor.

Fortunately (or not, depending on how you look at it), when you buy fresh oregano, you're rarely given a choice of variety. For much of the year, most stores sell Greek oregano, which is what the country's largest herb supplier (The Greenhouse in Encinitas, California) offers. But depending on the season and the availability of Greek oregano, you might instead find Mexican oregano, or some other variety. Though the flavors of these oreganos may be a little more or less intense (Mexican is usually stronger) they can be used interchangeably, so there's no need to

bring your botany book along to the grocery store.

A strong flavor needs other strong flavors

If you're looking for a delicate herbal flavor, skip ahead to read about oregano's refined cousin, marjoram. Oregano's flavor is bold and gutsy; it wants to be noticed. The herb is a natural with garlic; in fact, it's hard to find a recipe that includes oregano but not garlic. I also like to use it along with lemon or steeped in vinegar.

Strip the leaves off the stems. To use fresh oregano, hold the rinsed and dried stems in one hand and strip off the leaves by running your fingers of the other hand down the stems. Use whole leaves or chop them with a sharp, dry knife. The Italians traditionally also use the buds just before they flower.

Oregano dries well

Although I find fresh oregano more complex and interesting, the herb is among a handful that work well dried.

There's usually little choice when buying fresh oregano, but some spice lines, including



Fresh oregano has an intriguing, complex flavor, and the herb is among the few that dry well.

McCormick's, and mail-order spice houses, like Penzeys, offer both Greek (McCormick's calls it Mediterranean) and Mexican varieties. You'll notice more difference between the two varieties when they're dried than when they're fresh since drying intensifies aspects of the herb's flavor.

Use Greek oregano in Italian, French, and (obviously) Greek recipes. The more pungent Mexican oregano is used in commercial chili powders as well as in homemade chili and other Latin American fare. Its spicier flavor is balanced nicely by cilantro, and it's a natural partner for cumin.

Dry your own fresh oregano. If you have an excess of fresh oregano, you can dry it by tying the stems together and hanging it in a warm, dry, well-

ventilated place. Oregano dried at its peak will likely have more flavor than supermarket varieties, which can vary in age. I store my homemade dry oregano *en branche*, as the French say, in a paper bag in a dark place, and crumble the leaves off the branches as I need them. Storing the whole branches helps keep the volatile oils intact.

For delicacy, try marjoram

Sometimes oregano's hearty nature can overpower a dish. In such cases, I turn to its more demure cousin, marjoram. Some recipes suggest that marjoram and oregano are interchangeable. I disagree. Taste a leaf of marjoram and one of oregano side by side. Marjoram has a kind of woody perfume with soft floral edges while oregano has an earthy, sharp, almost resinous quality.

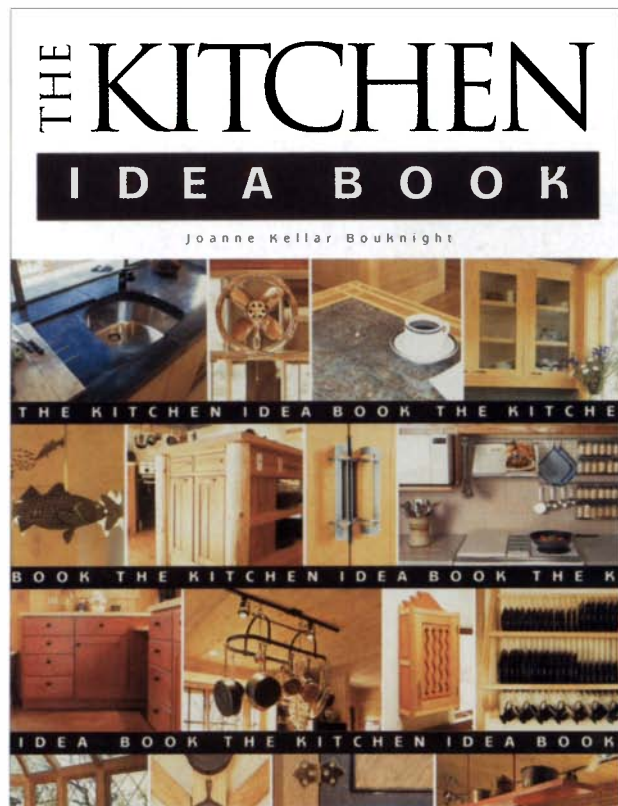
Best used fresh, marjoram is generally found in the more refined dishes of northern France and in England, while oregano's bold flavors are more characteristic of the rustic dishes of southern France, Italy, and Greece.

Experiment with oregano and marjoram

- ◆ Toast fresh oregano leaves lightly in a pan and add them to your favorite chili or taco recipe.
- ◆ Drizzle olive oil over a hunk of feta cheese that's been topped with oregano leaves and serve with olives.
- ◆ Sprinkle fresh whole leaves of marjoram in a salad of greens.
- ◆ Match the woody flavor and perfume of marjoram by adding some to a sauté of mushrooms.
- ◆ Toss marjoram and toasted pecans with thinly sliced oranges and leeks dressed with pecan oil.

Lynn Alley wrote *Lost Arts* (Ten Speed Press), a cook's guide to hand-made ingredients. ◆

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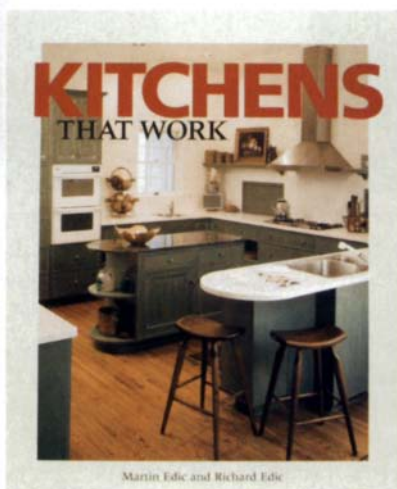


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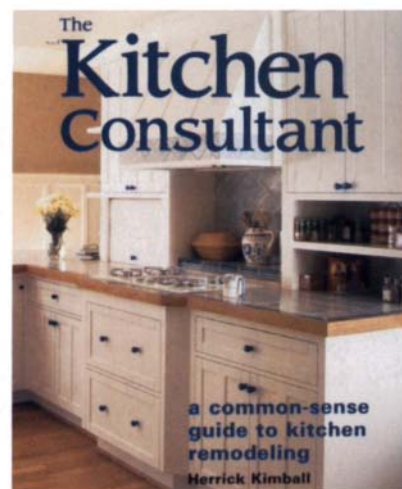
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Less Really Is More When Making Reduction Sauces

A reduction sauce can be anything from a rich, complex veal demi-glace to a quick, delicious sauce that you make from the bits left in the pan after you sauté a couple of steaks. Indeed, many fine sauces owe their marvelous complex taste and silky body to this basic technique: classic stock-based sauces such as *chasseur* and *bordelaise*, red- and white-wine sauces, and many cream sauces. Even sauces that get their body through means other than reducing, like a *béchamel* (which is thickened with a roux), gain in flavor when simmered a bit to concentrate and transform their ingredients.

Reducing, which happens through simmering or boiling, removes water by evaporation, and therefore concentrates and intensifies flavors, but less water is only one of the reasons that reduced liquids taste good. Some acids and other strong-tasting compounds have low boiling points and are actually boiled off, enhancing the flavor of the remaining liquid by their removal. Not only are some unpleasant-tasting compounds removed, some potential problem ingredients are removed, too. For example, when you reduce wine, tannins and other compounds that might cause any cream in the sauce to curdle are boiled off, eliminating the risk.

Even more changes take place as your liquid simmers



Simmering reduces volume, concentrates flavors, and develops new flavors, transforming simple liquids like wine, stock, and cream into an unctuous, intensely flavored sauce.

away. The high heat speeds up chemical reactions, and some compounds in the sauce break apart while others join together, creating new compounds that have totally different flavors.

During the reduction, the liquid boils and some is spattered on the pan just above the sauce level. As the sauce reduces, some particles of dried sauce are left on the pan. This dried sauce gets quite hot since it isn't protected by liquid. The sauce contains both proteins and sugars from the meat, wine, and stock. At this higher heat, complex browning reactions (called Maillard reactions; see *Fine Cooking* #27, p. 88) take

place with the protein and sugars. Many of the same wonderful sweet compounds that form when sugar is caramelized are produced. Then, when you stir and splash the sauce back on these dried compounds, many of these are redissolved in the sauce.

Repeat the reduction to deepen the flavors

The flavors of your final sauce will of course be determined by how much you reduce the ingredients, but also by when each ingredient is reduced—a sauce made by reducing wine, adding stock and reducing it, and then adding cream and reducing that will taste much different than one

made by combining wine, stock, and cream and reducing them all together.

Some chefs even use multiple reductions of the same ingredient to get very complex layers of flavor. For example, a classic French *jus* (an intensely flavored, fairly light-bodied sauce) is made from repeated reductions of a small amount of stock added to a *mirepoix* and browned bones. You add the stock, cook it dry (taking care not to let it burn), add more stock, cook it dry again, repeating the process until the liquid is very flavorful. Each time you cook the pan dry, you allow the *mirepoix* and bones and glazy liquid to deepen in flavor. Then each time you add more stock, you dissolve the wonderful brown sweet compounds that were created. This sauce will taste entirely different (and much better, I think) than the same amount of stock added to the bones and *mirepoix* and just reduced slowly in one go.

These same principles apply to sauces that are an integral part of a dish, as in braises and stews. Louisiana chef Paul Prudhomme has an interesting technique that he calls “cooking on the bottom of the pan.” To make a gumbo, he will start with a little fat and some chopped onions, celery, peppers, and okra in his pan. He adds a cup or so of stock and reduces until the vegetables just start to stick and brown on the bottom. Then he adds another cup of stock, scrapes the bottom well to loosen the browned, cooked-on pieces, and then reduces again. He does this several times. This process cooks the vegetables, but more important, it produces wonderful,

sweet browned compounds that give the finished gumbo a deep, complex flavor.

How to make a quick reduction sauce

Here's one way to make a quick and delicious reduction sauce: Start by deglazing the skillet after you sauté seasoned pieces of meat (beef, pork, veal, lamb) in a little fat in a skillet. When the meat is cooked, transfer it to a plate and keep it warm. Pour off the fat, add red or white wine (or other flavorful alcohol, such as Cognac or Calvados) to the skillet, and simmer the liquid, scraping the pan to loosen any stuck-on meat particles, until there are just a few tablespoons of syrupy liquid left.

Next add a little stock and reduce again until the liquid is intensely flavored and slightly syrupy. Finally, add a little cream or *crème fraîche* and reduce until the sauce thickens slightly. You have only

to taste, add seasonings as needed, and spoon a wonderful hot sauce over the meat. In a medium to large heavy skillet, over high heat, the whole process takes only a few minutes.

Shirley O. Corriher, a food scientist and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of the award-winning CookWise (William Morrow). ♦

Tips for successful reduction sauces

- ♦ If you're using wine in the sauce, be sure to use a decent quality one, something that you'd drink with the meal you're making, if possible. And definitely don't use "cooking wine," which is very poor quality wine that contains salt.
- ♦ Don't try making a reduction sauce with regular canned stock: it's generally quite salty to begin with and when reduced will be too highly salted. Homemade stock is best, if you have it, or try a low-sodium prepared stock.
- ♦ If you plan to finish the sauce with cream, be sure that any wine or other alcohol has been sufficiently cooked off before adding the cream, to prevent curdling.
- ♦ Once a reduction sauce is finished, don't try holding it over low heat because it will continue to reduce slowly. Instead, take it off the heat and reheat gently just before serving. This is especially important if the sauce was finished with cream or butter: the emulsion that was formed between the liquids and the fat in the cream or butter can break if not enough liquid remains to go between the droplets of fat. Free fat will form on the edges and the top of the sauce. If this happens, you can usually reverse it by whisking in a little water or stock to restore an adequate liquid-to-fat balance.

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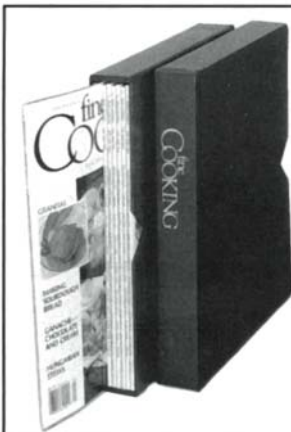
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Enjoying Wine

The user-friendly wine lists pictured are from **The Slanted Door** in San Francisco, which serves Asian cooking (415/861-8032), and from **Ray's Boathouse** in Seattle (206/784-6818), one of the country's top seafood restaurants.

Pasta in Soup

Cliff Wright is using a skimmer from **All-Clad's** new line of hand tools. To find a retail source, call 800/255-2523.



Carrots

The large Nantes carrots featured in Seen Lippert's story came from **Paradise Farm Organics** in Moscow, Idaho. Aside from all kinds of organic vegetables and herbs, Paradise also sells everything from peanut butter to cake mix to pet food. Everything in the 90-page catalog is hand-mixed and packaged by Paradise. For information, call 800/758-2418.

Main-Dish Potatoes

Wood Prairie Farm in Maine is a

certified organic producer that sells 15 varieties of potato by mail-order; for those with a little more patience, the company also sells seed potatoes so you can grow your own. Call 800/829-9765.

Tamarind

Tamarind is sold in many specialty markets, especially in Mexican, Indian, and Southeast Asian markets. Or try ordering by mail: **Melissa's By Mail** (800/588-0151) carries dried tamarind pods, and the following companies offer compressed tamarind and tamarind concentrate: **Adriana's Caravan** (800/316-0820); **Seema Enterprises** (800/557-3362 or 314/423-9990); and **Bazaar of India** (510/548-4110).

Coffee Desserts

Joanne Chang grates chocolate over her *tiramisú* with a **Zyliss grater**; Williams-Sonoma and other kitchen stores carry them. If you can't find a jelly roll pan or sheet pan with the dimensions called for in the *tiramisú* recipe, try these mail-order sources:

King Arthur Baker's Catalogue (800/827-6836) offers a 10x15-inch jelly roll pan for \$12.95.

Bridge Kitchenware (800/274-3435 or, within New York, 212/838-1901) carries 10½x15½-inch jelly roll pans (standard, \$9.99; heavy, \$15.95).

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Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
New Potato Salad with Vegetables	28	500	260	21	41	29	4	7	17	115	330	5	
Lemon-Chive Vinaigrette	28	90	90	0	1	10	2	2	6	0	75	0	per 1 Tbs.
Mushroom & Asparagus Shepherd's Pie	28	490	250	10	50	28	17	8	1	75	1430	6	based on 6 servings
Lucia's Best Mashed Potatoes	29	230	110	4	26	13	8	4	1	35	830	2	based on 8 servings
Braised Potatoes & Eggplant	29	250	130	4	29	14	2	10	2	0	270	6	based on 8 servings
Potato & Leek Gratin	30	660	350	18	61	39	24	12	2	150	810	5	
Glazed Ginger-Soy Chicken	32	440	220	43	8	24	7	10	5	135	900	1	using 3-lb. chicken
Glazed Mustard-Molasses Chicken	32	460	220	43	16	25	7	10	5	135	710	0	using 3-lb. chicken
Glazed Balsamic-Orange Chicken	33	470	220	43	17	24	7	10	5	135	420	0	using 3-lb. chicken
Minestra di Pasta e Fagioli	36	460	150	31	45	17	5	9	2	45	490	9	based on 8 servings
Minestra di Pasta e Piselli	36	300	150	14	22	17	7	7	2	25	840	3	
Tortellini in Brodo with Lamb	36	590	300	30	39	33	13	15	3	85	630	2	
Beef & Chicken Broth	37	20	5	2	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	230	0	per 1 cup
Glazed Carrots & Shallots	40	210	110	2	26	12	7	3	1	30	540	5	
Mediterranean Carrot Salad	41	340	250	3	25	28	4	20	3	0	560	7	
Carrot & Coriander Soup	41	230	130	5	21	15	9	4	1	40	390	6	
Carrot & Ginger Soufflé	42	190	130	6	10	14	8	4	1	170	270	2	
Roasted Carrots with Herbs	42	160	60	2	23	7	1	5	1	0	560	7	
Roasted Game Hens with Pine Nut Pilaf	49	1300	750	106	30	83	31	30	16	385	1590	2	
Sole with Pine Nuts, Lemon & Basil	50	660	490	41	8	54	8	32	12	80	1300	2	
Chocolate Pine Nut Cookies	50	80	50	1	7	6	3	2	1	10	5	0	per cookie
Pine Nut-Tahini Sauce (<i>Tarator</i> Sauce)	51	60	50	2	2	6	1	2	2	0	50	1	per 1 Tbs.
Buttermilk Pie	53	370	160	6	48	18	9	6	2	85	270	1	
Perfect Pie Pastry	53	160	70	3	19	8	3	3	1	10	150	1	
Potato Gnocchi with Brown Butter	58	330	140	7	41	16	10	5	1	70	640	2	
Stir-Fried Tamarind Beef	62	580	170	39	62	19	7	9	3	75	1210	5	with 1 cup cooked rice
Roasted Red Pepper Ketchup	63	30	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	85	1	per 1 Tbs.
Whole Roasted Snapper with Tamarind	63	340	30	35	43	3.5	0.5	1	1.5	55	680	5	
Coffee Ice Cream with Espresso Brittle	67	510	290	7	50	32	18	10	2	310	125	0	per ½ cup
Espresso Brittle	67	60	15	0	13	1.5	1	0.5	0	5	35	0	per 1 Tbs.
Chocolate Espresso Torte	68	270	180	4	24	20	12	6	1	110	90	2	
<i>Tiramisù</i>	68	410	230	8	34	26	16	6	3	230	100	1	
Coffee "Tea" Cakes	69	330	140	4	44	15	9	4	1	45	260	1	per tea cake
"Walk-Away" Roast Chicken	82	840	420	70	33	47	12	22	9	210	1240	4	based on 3 servings

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Roast Chicken with Potatoes and Onions—All in One Pan

It's almost an unwritten law that when you begin to cook dinner, someone is going to ask you to do something that takes you into another room, outside, or down the street. The solution to this problem is what I call "walk-away" recipes. They're the ones that practically cook themselves while you play with the kids or rescue the cat from the neighbor's fire escape. Spend ten minutes putting this chicken and some vegetables in the oven and just walk away. Then go ahead and read the newspaper while the oven does the work. But wait, you ask, what about all that basting? Don't even think about it. You'll

only end up with skin that's chewy and golden instead of browned and crisp.

If you're serving more people for dinner, simply double the ingredients. But instead of roasting a bird twice the size, which takes more time and care, simply roast two smaller birds in a larger pan (and you get more crisp skin that way).

Finally, you can use dried herbs or fresh herbs in the rub. If you're using fresh, throw a few sprigs into the bird's cavity along with the lemon for even more flavor.

Gordon Hamersley is the chef-owner of Hamersley's Bistro in Boston. ♦

"Walk-Away" Roast Chicken with Lemon & Herbs

If you're serving three people, you may want to toss in a few more potatoes. *Serves two to three.*

- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- 2 Tbs. Dijon-style mustard**
- 1 tsp. dried thyme**
(or 1 Tbs. fresh, chopped)
- 1 tsp. dried rosemary**
(or 1 Tbs. fresh, chopped)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 1 lemon, halved**
- 1 whole roasting chicken**
(about 3½ lb.), rinsed under cold water and dried
- 1 onion, cut into thick slices**
- 4 medium red potatoes, washed (but not peeled) and sliced in half**

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a small bowl, combine 1 Tbs. of the olive oil, the mustard, thyme, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Squeeze the juice from one lemon half into the herb mixture; squeeze the juice from the other half into a small bowl and reserve. Reserve the squeezed lemon halves. Spoon the herb mixture over the chicken and inside its cavity, rubbing to coat the bird thoroughly. Put the reserved lemon halves inside the chicken's cavity.

Put the onion and potatoes in a roasting pan. Season them with salt and pepper and toss them with the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil. Scatter the ingredients around the pan to make room in the center for the chicken.

Put the chicken in the pan, breast side up. Cook until the meat is tender and the juices run clear at the thigh, about 1¼ hours. By this time, the potatoes and onions should be tender.

Transfer the vegetables to a serving platter. Pour the juices from inside the chicken's cavity into the roasting pan and transfer the chicken to a cutting board and let it rest.

Spoon off and discard as much fat as possible from the juices in the roasting pan. Set the pan with the juices over medium-low heat and pour in the reserved lemon juice along with ½ cup water. Bring to a boil, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan.

Cut the chicken into pieces (or serve it whole, if you like). Pour the pan juices over the chicken and serve.



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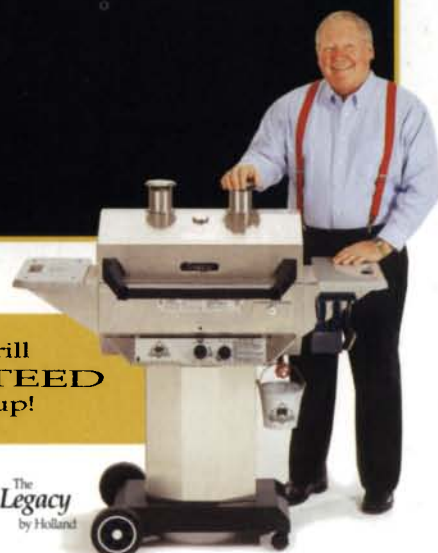
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In 1985, Stephen McCarthy set out to turn Oregon fruit into brandy that would rival the best French bottles. His friends thought he was crazy. After all, it takes nearly nine tons of Bartlett pears to yield only 100 gallons of brandy. But McCarthy ignored the naysayers, bought a German still, installed it in a small warehouse in Northwest Portland, and began distilling pure eau de vie—first with pears from his family orchards, and later with cherries, plums, and apples from all over Oregon. Today, the brandies from McCarthy's company, Clear Creek Distillery, are considered the finest quality in America. "The single most important thing in making a good fruit brandy is using perfectly ripe fruit," McCarthy acknowledges. "Then we do as little to it as possible."



The eaux de vie (from left, plum, pear, apple, and cherry) wear eye-catching labels from a Portland design team. McCarthy also makes framboise, grappa, and marc, and he has just begun producing small batches of single-malt Oregon whiskey.

Buying spices

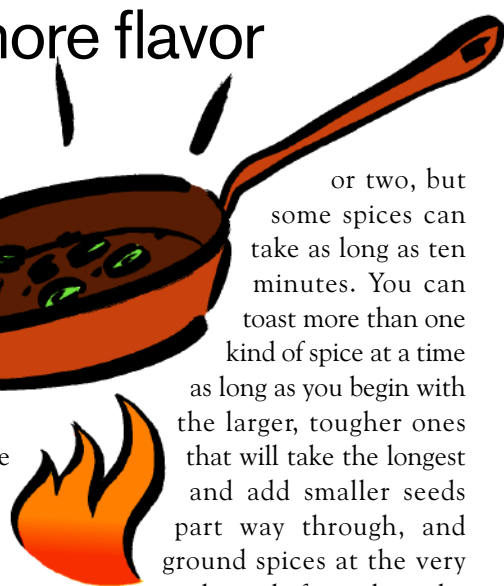
Most spices are sold both whole and ground. With few exceptions, it's preferable to buy whole spices and grind them yourself (see *Whole vs. Ground* at lower left).

- ◆ Shop in a busy store that's apt to move its inventory rapidly.
- ◆ Don't buy any spices that look faded or uneven in color.
- ◆ For whole spices, check that there's very little powder or broken bits in the container.
- ◆ For ground spices, the finer the grind, the better the quality.
- ◆ When buying spices from a bulk bin, make sure the spice has plenty of aroma.
- ◆ Don't buy more than you can use within six months to a year for ground spices and a year or two for whole spices.
- ◆ Consider buying high-quality spices from reputable mail-order companies (see *Sources*, lower right).

Toasting for more flavor

To make spices more aromatic and fuller in flavor, toast them before you add them to a dish. In fact, the pungent character of many spice blends and Indian curries depends on an initial toasting. Whole spices are the most convenient to toast; ground spices demand more attention because they can burn in a matter of seconds.

The simplest method is to heat the spices in a heavy-based pan (one that accommodates the spices in a single layer for even cooking) over gentle heat without any oil or fat. Shake or stir to prevent the spices from burning and to monitor their progress. They're ready when they become slightly darker and highly aromatic. Depending on the spice (small seeds toast more quickly than large berries), toasting only takes a minute



or two, but some spices can take as long as ten minutes. You can toast more than one kind of spice at a time as long as you begin with the larger, tougher ones that will take the longest and add smaller seeds part way through, and ground spices at the very end, just before taking the pan off the heat. Once toasted, immediately pour the spices out of the pan to stop them from cooking further; burned spices taste unpleasantly acrid. Toasted spices can be stored tightly covered for a few weeks without losing much of their flavor.

Cumin, coriander, fennel seed, and dried chile peppers really benefit from a brief toasting. Cardamom, cloves, cinnamon sticks, and mustard seed also improve with toasting.

Flavor profiles

One of the defining characteristics of any given cuisine is the spices that dominate it. When combining spices, it sometimes helps to think in terms of geography. Here are the spices, as well as the herbs and aromatics with which they're commonly paired, in various cuisines around the world.

Caribbean: nutmeg, ginger, and allspice, along with fresh chiles, fresh ginger, and garlic.

Chinese: five-spice powder (cinnamon, clove, fennel seeds, star anise, Sichuan pepper), along with garlic, fresh ginger, scallions, and soy sauce.

Indian: cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, mustard, and turmeric.

Mexican: cumin, coriander, cinnamon, cayenne, and black pepper, along with fresh and dried chiles, fresh oregano, and cilantro.

North African: cumin, saffron, paprika, turmeric, black pepper, cinnamon, and ginger.

Northern Europe: caraway, cardamom, cinnamon, dill, mustard, and nutmeg, along with bay leaf, thyme, and tarragon.

Mediterranean: black pepper, fennel seed, mustard, cayenne, and saffron, along with anchovies, basil, garlic, olive oil, and parsley.

Middle East: allspice, cloves, cinnamon, and cumin, along with garlic, mint, parsley, and tahini.

Thai: cumin, star anise, and turmeric, along with fresh chiles, basil, cilantro, lemongrass, and fish sauce.



Spice mixes

When spices are combined, they create a whole new wonderful flavor. Some combinations, such as Chinese five-spice powder and the Indian spice mixture called *garam masala*, have become practically standardized. But making up your own mixes is fun, too. Use the following recipes as guidelines, adding, eliminating, and altering according to your own developing tastes. Store your spice mixes in airtight containers and use them within a few weeks.

Barbecue Dry Rub

- 1 part cayenne
- 1 part paprika
- 1 part salt
- 1 part black or white peppercorns, ground
- ½ part dried thyme
- ¼ part ground nutmeg

Garam Masala

- 1 part cardamom seeds
- 1 part whole cloves
- 1 part cumin seeds
- 1 part black peppercorns
- 1 part ground nutmeg
- 1 part ground cinnamon

Toast and grind the whole spices.

Chili Powder

- 3 parts ground dried mild chile, such as ancho or pasilla
- 1 part dried oregano, crumbled
- 1 part cumin seeds, toasted and ground
- ½ part cayenne, or to taste

Crab & Shrimp Boil

- 1 part dill seeds
- 1 part caraway seeds
- 1 part kosher salt
- ½ part whole black peppercorns
- ½ part whole allspice berries

Simmer 1 Tbs. of spice mix for each quart of water for 10 min. before adding seafood.

Chinese Five-Spice

- 1 part star anise, ground
- 1 part Sichuan peppercorns, ground
- 1 part fennel seeds, ground
- ½ part cloves, ground
- ½ part ground cinnamon

Mulling Spices for Cider or Wine

- 1 part cinnamon stick
- 1 part orange zest
- ½ part allspice berries
- ¼ part whole cloves
- Sugar to taste (optional)

Mail-order sources:

Adriana's Caravan
800/316-0820

Dean & DeLuca
800/221-7714

Penzey's Ltd.
414/574-0277

Atlantic Spice Co.
800/316-7965

Foods of India
212/683-4419

San Francisco Herb Co.
800/227-4530

Cooking with spices

Since many spices are quite pungent, it's best to add them in modest doses until you're comfortable with their character. Here are a few time-tested techniques for adding spice to your cooking:

- ◆ Add spices to the oil used to sauté the aromatics (onions, garlic, and such) at the start of a stew, curry, tomato sauce, braise, or other long-cooking liquid-based dish. This initial "frying" eliminates the need to toast the spices beforehand.
- ◆ Leave spices whole in stocks, broths, pickling brines, and other clear liquids so as not to cloud the liquid. Tie the spices into a cheesecloth bundle and simmer them in the liquid. If you're going to strain the liquid, simply toss the spices in loose.

- ◆ Season the flour for dredging meat, poultry, or fish before browning or sautéing with a few ground spices.
- ◆ Sprinkle a small amount of toasted, ground spice or spice mixture over a stew or curry just before serving.
- ◆ Whisk or stir in ground (better yet, toasted and ground) spices to flavor salsas, mayonnaise, dressings, and other



uncooked foods. Yogurt, sour cream, and other dairy-based dressings carry the flavor of spices very well.

- ◆ Rub ground, cracked, or whole spices onto meats, poultry, fish, and even vegetables before roasting or grilling (a brushing of oil before adding the spices will help them adhere to lean meats and vegetables). Add salt to spice rubs to enhance the effect.
- ◆ Add ground spices to the dry ingredients when baking. Whisk or sift them to ensure they're evenly distributed.
- ◆ Infuse vinegar with a single spice or a mix and sprinkle it onto salads and vegetables.
- ◆ Combine dried herbs (including thyme, oregano, rosemary, and bay leaves) with spices to round out their flavors.

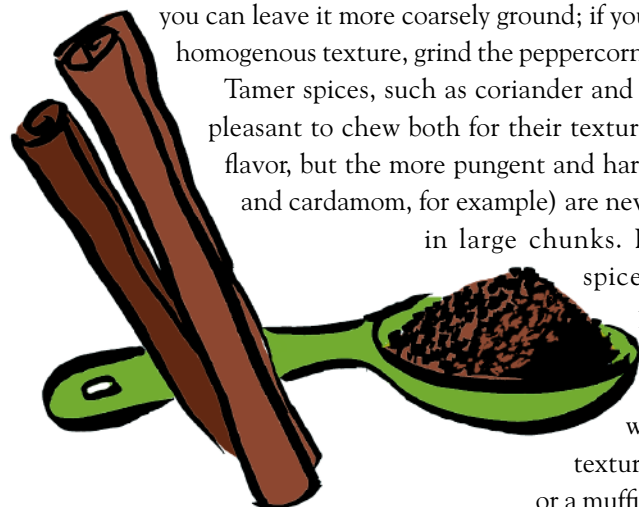
Whole vs. ground spices

Most spices are best bought whole and ground as needed. Because their seed coatings and hulls protect their flavors, whole spices last longer. Once ground, the volatile character of a spice begins to fade and deteriorates entirely within as little time as a few months. Whole spices are also easier to toast and can be ground to different textures. But some spices, such as ginger and cinnamon, are difficult to grind by hand, so buy them ground.

The decision to use a spice whole, cracked, or ground depends on the spice itself, on tradition, and on personal preference. For example, if you like the zest and crunch of biting into a large bit of black peppercorn, you can leave it more coarsely ground; if you prefer a more homogenous texture, grind the peppercorns more finely.

Tamer spices, such as coriander and fennel, can be pleasant to chew both for their texture and for their flavor, but the more pungent and hard spices (clove and cardamom, for example) are never appreciated in large chunks. Finely ground

spices are also important in baking, where a coarse grind would ruin the texture of, say, a cake or a muffin.



Storing spices

Store spices in airtight containers (small tinted glass jars are ideal) away from light, heat, and moisture. Light will fade both the color and character of a spice, and heat, even the indirect heat from a refrigerator or dishwasher motor, will dissipate the volatile aromas of a spice. A cool cupboard or drawer works well. Some authorities recommend keeping spices in the freezer, which can slow down the aging process; just be sure you don't forget about them. Also be aware that condensation from a cold spice jar in a warm kitchen can cause the spice to get wet.

Illustrations: Julie Johnson




Grinding and crushing spices

Grinding or crushing releases the volatile aromatic flavor of a spice, and doing so immediately before cooking will deepen the flavor of any spiced dish. For crushing or grinding a small amount of spices, a mortar and pestle is the perfect tool—it's quick and you can control the coarseness of the grind. Begin by pressing down with the pestle to crack the spices, and then work the pestle in a circular motion, grinding the spices against the surface of the mortar until they're ground to your liking. For a large batch, a spice mill or a coffee grinder, set aside specifically for the purpose, is convenient and neat. If you want to simply crack or crush some spices without grinding them to a powder, set the spices on a cutting board (in a sturdy plastic bag for less mess) and bear down with the bottom of a heavy saucepan or a heavy wooden rolling pin. If you're grinding spices to add to delicate baked goods, sift them after grinding to get rid of any obstinate woody bits and pieces.

24 essential spices, with a key to their flavors and tips for their use

Spices are the dried aromatic parts—the seeds, berries, buds, flowers, roots, and bark—of certain plants and trees. When fresh and fragrant, spices add a delicious appeal to savory and sweet foods. Learn to use their full dynamic flavor range, from subtle perfumes to intense pungency.

<div><div>Filé Powder (Gumbo Filé)</div><div>dried ground</div><div>Olive-green powder ground from dried sassafras.</div></div>		Woody and earthy with a slightly sweet note, suggestive of root beer.	Add at the very end of cooking or it becomes stringy. Some brands contain ground thyme.	A thickener and a flavoring, it's used almost exclusively to thicken gumbo, the classic Creole stew. Can add an earthy background flavor to other spicy soups and stews.
<div><div>Ginger (dried)</div><div>ground</div><div>Fine, buff-colored powder ground from dried ginger rhizome.</div></div>		Sweet and slightly hot, with a refreshing clean, sharp, almost lemony pungency.	Ground is not interchangeable with fresh.	The defining flavor of gingerbread, it's popular in sweets including cakes, breads, cookies, and desserts. On the savory side, it's often used in Indian curries and in American barbecue sauce. In Morocco, cooks use only ground ginger, never fresh.
<div><div>Juniper Berries</div><div>whole berries</div><div>Purple-black, leathery, dried berries the size of peas.</div></div>		Pungent and piny with the scent of gin and a sweet-tart flavor.	Lightly crush the berries to release their powerful flavor. Resinous character easily overpowers a dish.	A classic flavoring for marinating and stewing rich game meats, including venison, boar, and dark-meat game birds. Adds an astringent note to rich pâtés, red-wine marinades, pickling brines, and assertive Germanic dishes such as sauerbraten, cured ham, and stuffed goose.
<div><div>Mustard</div><div>whole seeds, ground milled powder</div><div>Pale yellow to dark brown tiny, smooth, round seeds.</div></div>		Pungent, sharp, and full; heat ranges from mild (light yellow seeds) to fiery (dark brown).	Mustard's pungency develops only when the seed is broken and moistened.	Main ingredient in prepared mustard. Crushed or coarsely ground seeds add flavor and texture to spice rubs for meats. Whole seeds used in pickling brines and poaching liquids. Sprouted seeds add a spicy bite to salads. Fry whole seeds for a nutty, not hot, taste.
<div><div>Nutmeg & Mace</div><div>nutmeg: seeds, ground mace: blades, ground</div><div>Nutmeg is the solid, brown, olive-size, hard seed of a fruit-bearing tree; mace is the nutmeg's thin, lacy, seed covering.</div></div>		Both are warm, sweet, rich, and aromatic; mace is somewhat softer.	Grate whole nutmeg on a small-holed grater or a nutmeg grinder. Mace blades can be added whole to infuse liquids or crushed and ground by hand.	Used interchangeably. Both spices have an affinity for sweet or savory egg and cream-based recipes including pudding, custard, eggnog, quiche, and macaroni and cheese. Often teamed with cinnamon and cloves for pies, cakes, and cookies. A dash of nutmeg nicely rounds out sautéed spinach, pumpkin and squash dishes, terrines, and pâtés.
<div><div>Paprika</div><div>ground</div><div>Finely ground powder ranging in color from flame red to russet; made from the mild to medium pimienta chile.</div></div>		Earthy and round with a spicy-sweet flavor. Comes in sweet and hot varieties.	The color darkens if stored too long. For best flavor, buy Hungarian paprika.	Found in many classic European dishes including stroganoff, paprikash, and Hungarian goulash. Sweet paprika adds an earthy tomato-bell-pepper flavor to chicken, meat, and vegetable soups and stews. Good with eggs and seafood. Pungent varieties stand up to hearty meats, grilled dishes, spice rubs, and other assertive flavorings. More than a coloring agent, it adds a warm tang to many savory recipes.
<div><div>Peppercorns</div><div>black and white: whole, cracked, ground green: whole, dried, and brined</div><div>Small, round, dried berries from a tropical vine that come in three varieties—black, white, and green—depending on their ripeness and processing.</div></div>		A distinctive sharp bite, with the bold, rich taste of black most familiar. White is hotter and slightly floral. Green is mildest and freshest tasting.	Best freshly ground. White pepper is best when cooked. For a more complex flavor, mix two or three types. Use green peppercorns whole or lightly crushed.	Black pepper—paired with salt—is the ubiquitous seasoning for savory foods. Cracked or coarsely ground, it's great pressed onto the surface of meats and fish before grilling or sautéing. White pepper is especially good in white sauces and cream-based dishes. Green peppercorns pair well with the lighter flavors of vegetables, chicken, and fish. Use the slightly softer brined green ones, rinsed or not, in sauces, spreads, and pâtés.
<div><div>Pink Peppercorns</div><div>dried or brined whole berries</div><div>Small, bright pinkish-red berries with a papery, soft exterior.</div></div>		Mild, floral with a sharp, slightly resinous bite.	Not a true peppercorn. Combine with other peppercorns to give the mix a sweet note.	Used more for visual appeal than flavor, adding a bright garnish to salads, dressings, seafood, and vegetable dishes.
<div><div>Saffron</div><div>whole threads, ground</div><div>Deep red-orange threads; the dried hand-picked stigma from a specific crocus. Ground saffron is cheaper but often adulterated.</div></div>		Exotic, complex, and bitter with a sweet, floral perfume.	Toast a small pinch of threads first to deepen their flavor. Too much can impart a bitter, medicinal taste. Soak the crushed threads in a bit of warm water, then add the liquid and threads.	Saffron's singular aroma and deep golden color define such Mediterranean specialties as bouillabaisse, paella, and risotto Milanese. It also adds an exotic touch to simpler dishes of steamed rice, couscous, or pasta. Aside from a natural affinity to fennel, garlic, and tomatoes, saffron is best used in dishes without other strong flavorings. Saffron also gives breads and cakes a rich, golden color.
<div><div>Sichuan Pepper (Fagara)</div><div>whole berries, ground</div><div>Small, reddish-brown, woody berries. Not related to peppercorns.</div></div>		Pungent, peppery, woody; creates a slight numbing, tingling sensation.	Most of the aromatic character of the berry is in the husk. Toast first for a richer, more pleasing flavor.	An essential ingredient in Chinese five-spice powder, it adds an exotic aroma and tingling heat to poultry, pork, and red meat dishes when used whole in the cooking liquid or crushed and rubbed on the surface. Often combined with fresh ginger and hot chiles in Sichuan cooking. Toasted with salt and ground for use as a condiment.
<div><div>Star Anise</div><div>whole stars, broken bits, ground</div><div>Reddish-brown, dried, star-shaped fruit with a small, shiny seed in each of the points.</div></div>		Intensely licorice in aroma and taste. Sweeter and richer than aniseed and fennel seed.	When infusing smaller amounts of liquid, use only one or two points of a star as its flavor easily overwhelms.	An essential seasoning in the Vietnamese beef soup <i>phở</i> and in Chinese five-spice powder. Adds a sweet, warm flavor to meat and poultry stews and braises. Pairs with cinnamon and ginger in savory Asian recipes. On the sweet side, it can be added to fruit poaching liquids and hot spiced wine, or ground and added to cakes and cookies.
<div><div>Turmeric</div><div>ground</div><div>An intensely bright orange-yellow powder from a dried rhizome.</div></div>		Fragrant, earthy, somewhat chalky and bitter with a slight bite of peppery heat.	Ground turmeric maintains its color but loses its flavor quickly so buy in small amounts. Be careful when handling: it will stain clothes and counters.	Used to add saffron-gold color and a characteristic musty fragrance to spicy curries, stews, soups, and sauces. Good with meats, seafood, and vegetables. Often combined with other spices in North African couscous and Middle Eastern rice dishes. A component in commercial curry powders, it also gives prepared mustard a deeper yellow color and is used in making pickles, chutneys, and relishes.

Warm and sweet

An intrinsic relationship most familiarly exemplified by cinnamon



Hot

A sensation more than a flavor



Earthy

Woody; evocative of rich, damp soil



Pungent

A piercing and penetrating aroma and flavor



Anise

A licorice-like flavor



Perfumy

Brings to mind flowers, citrus, or pine

